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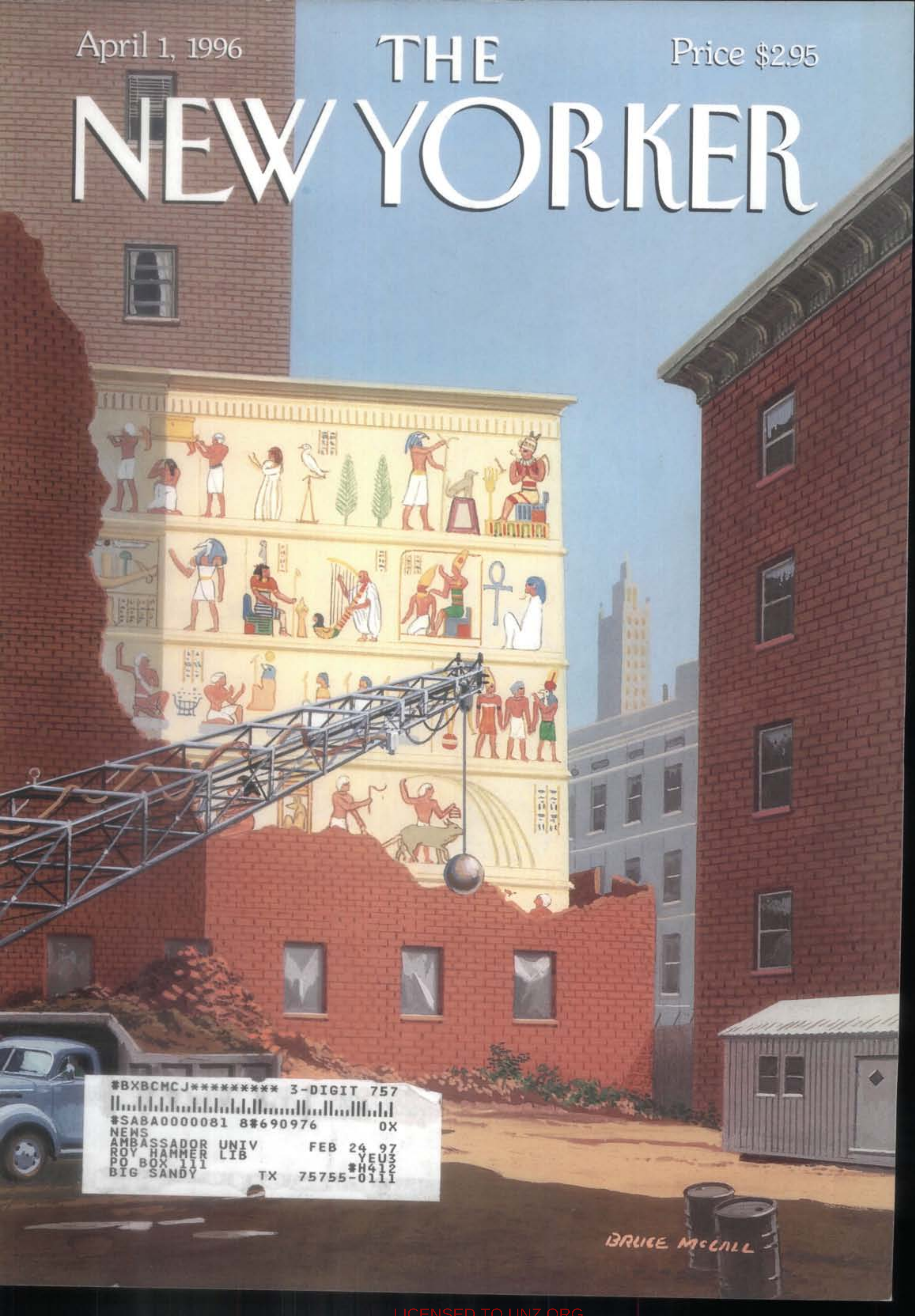

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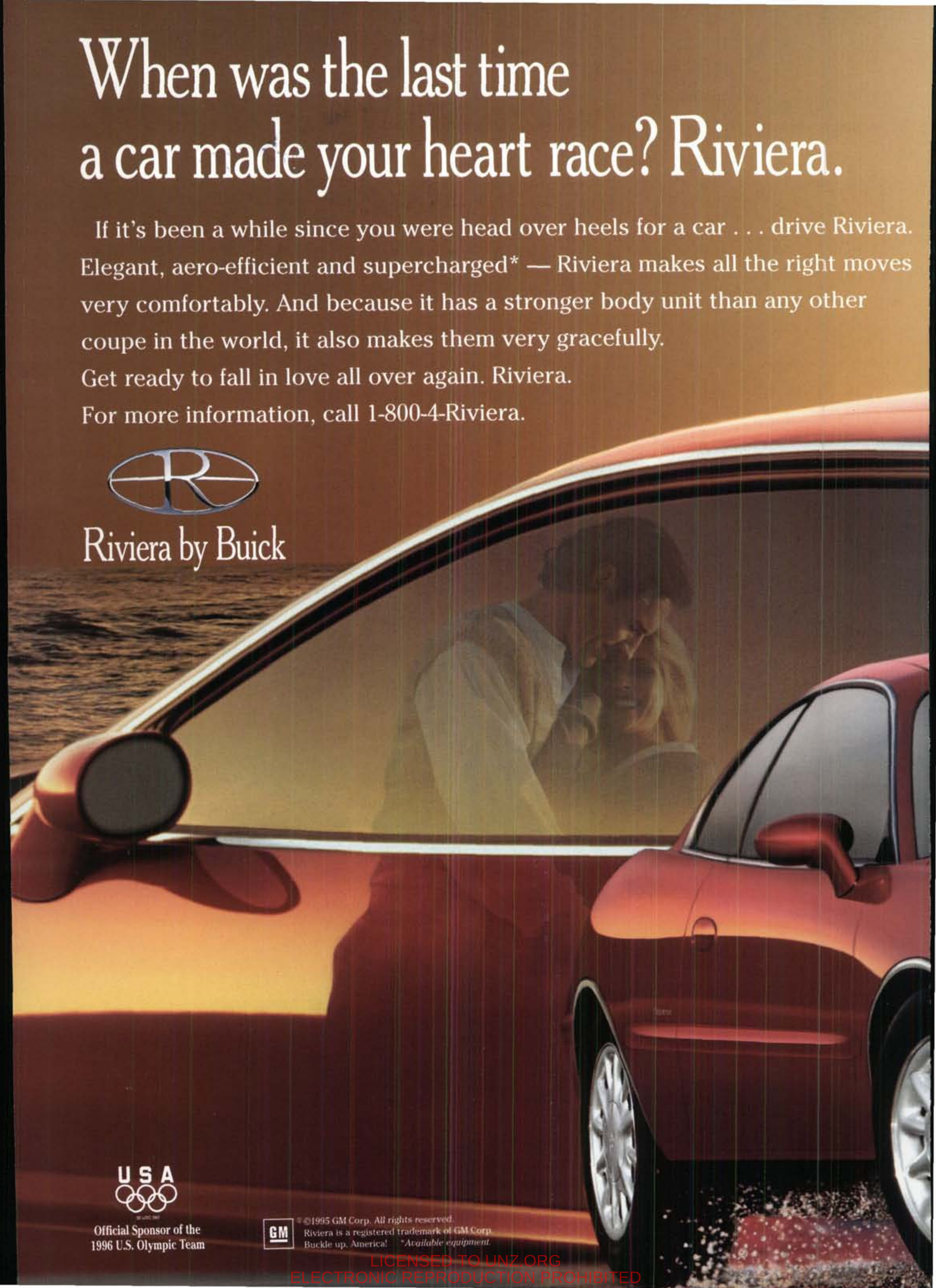

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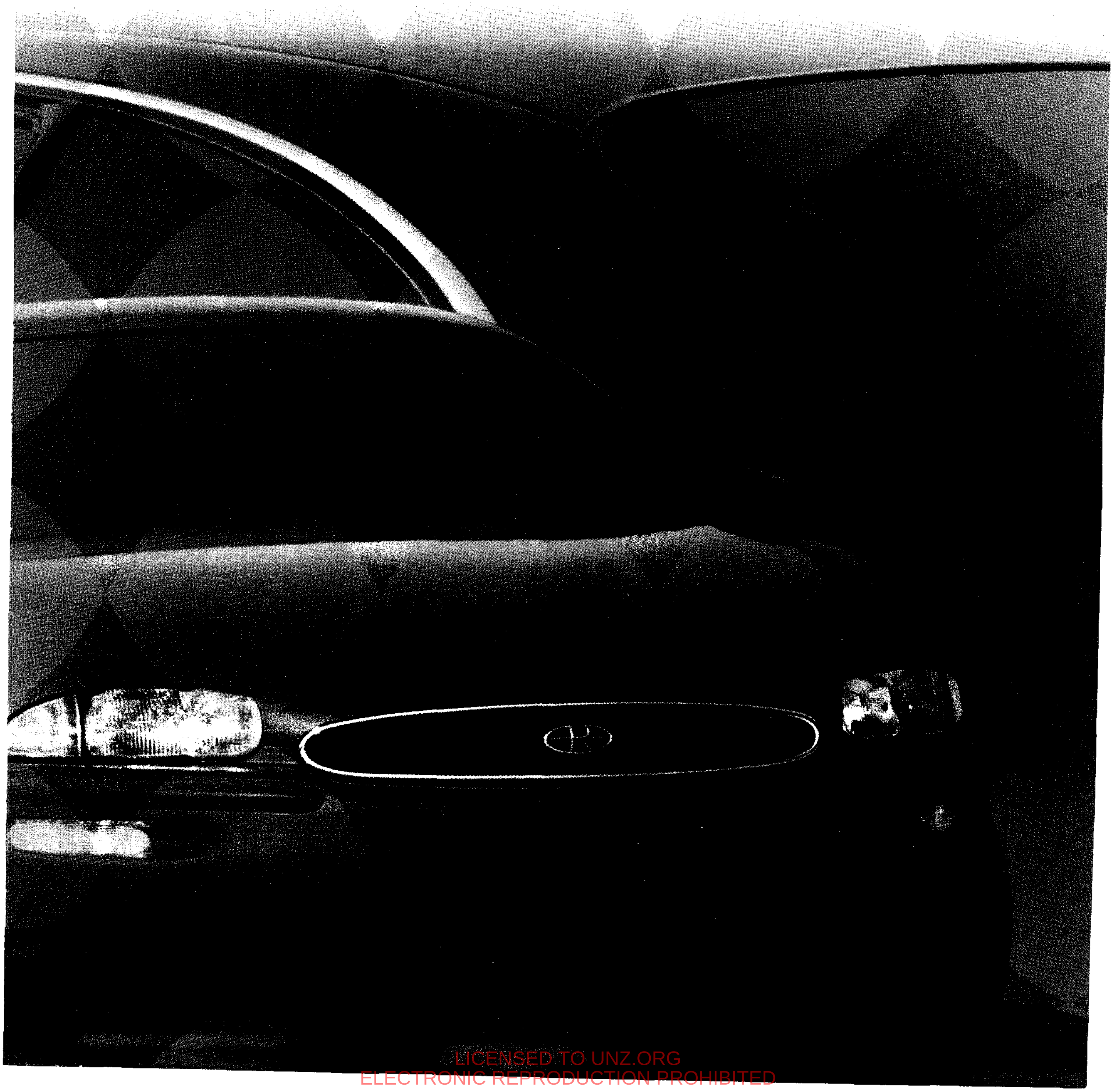

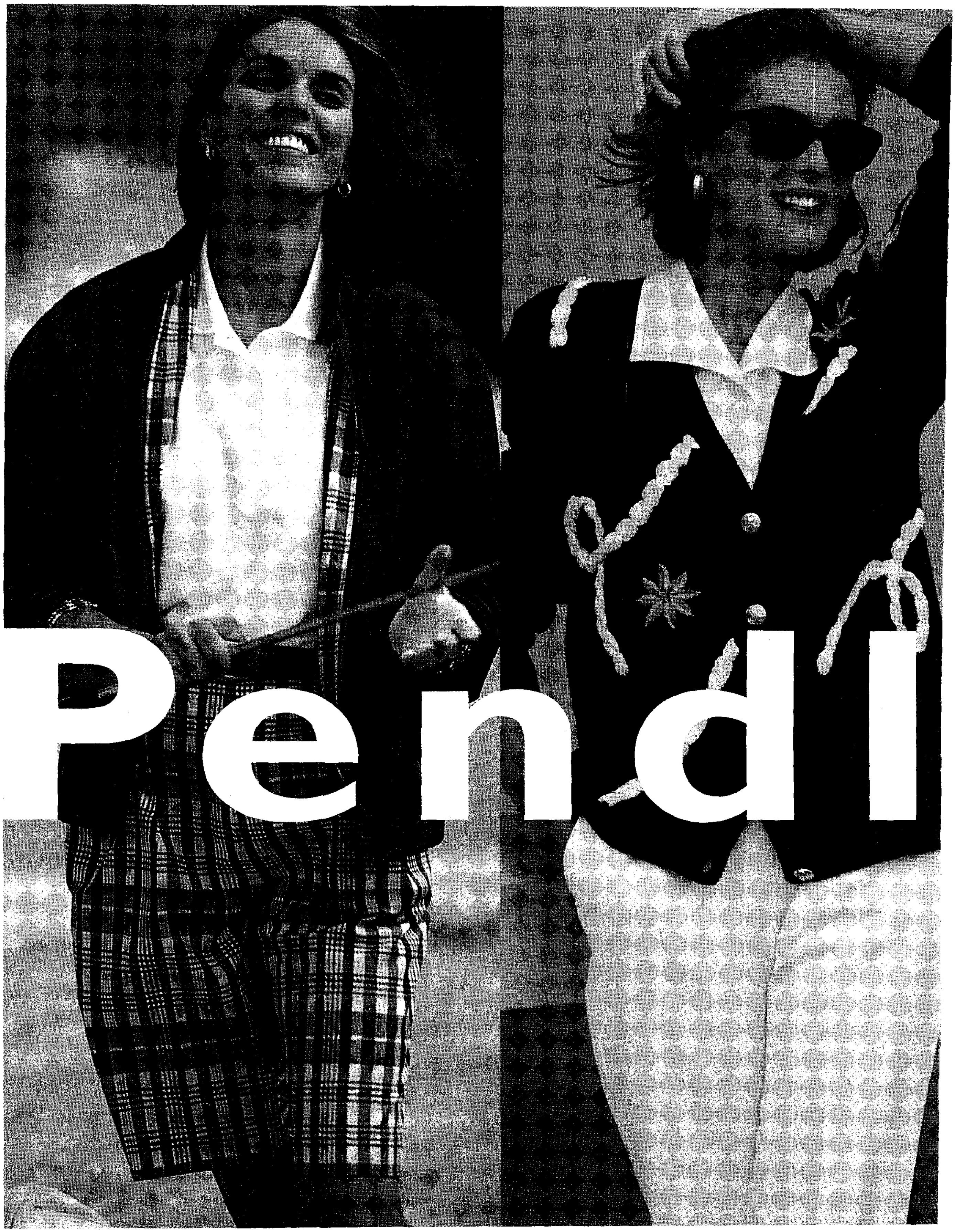

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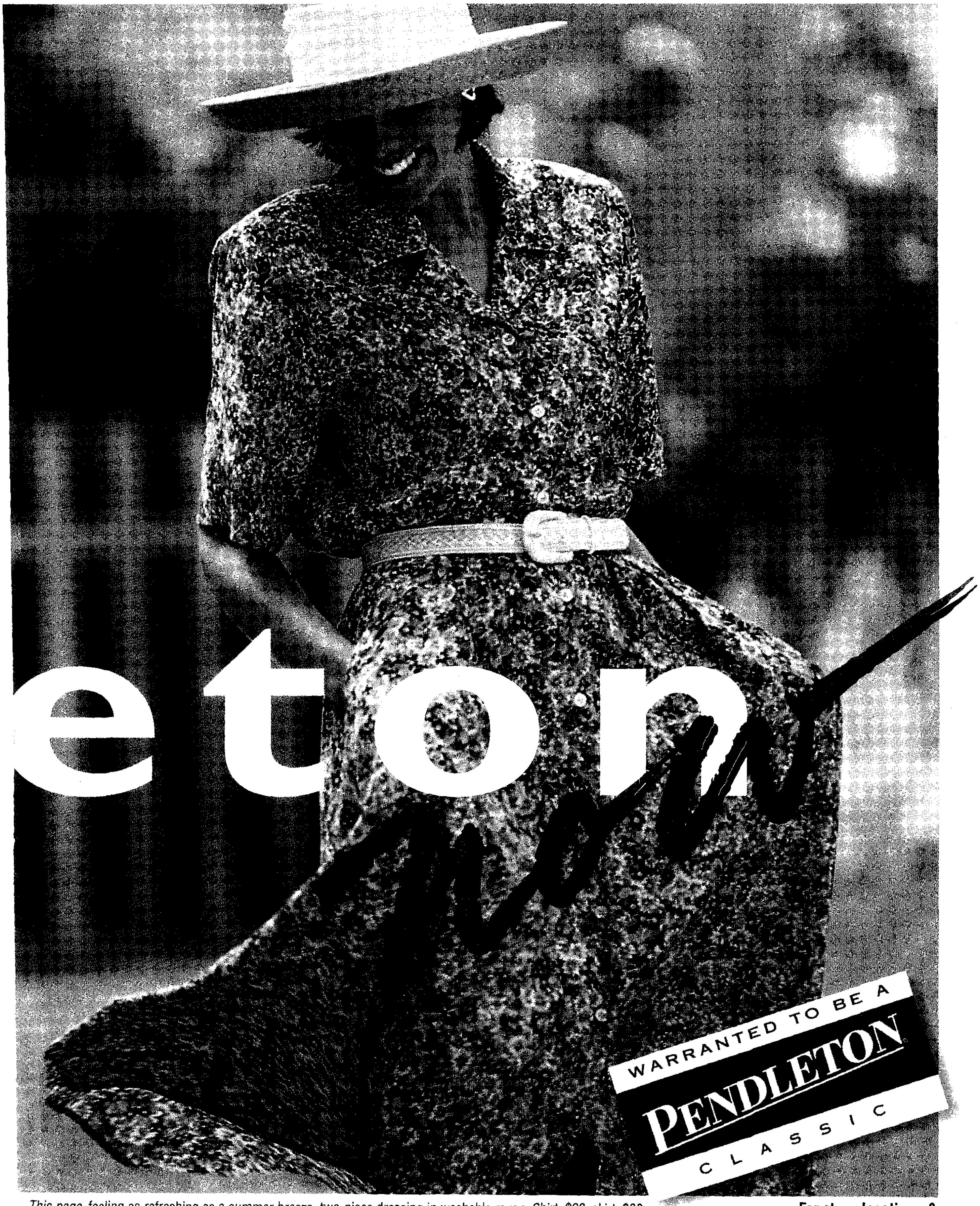
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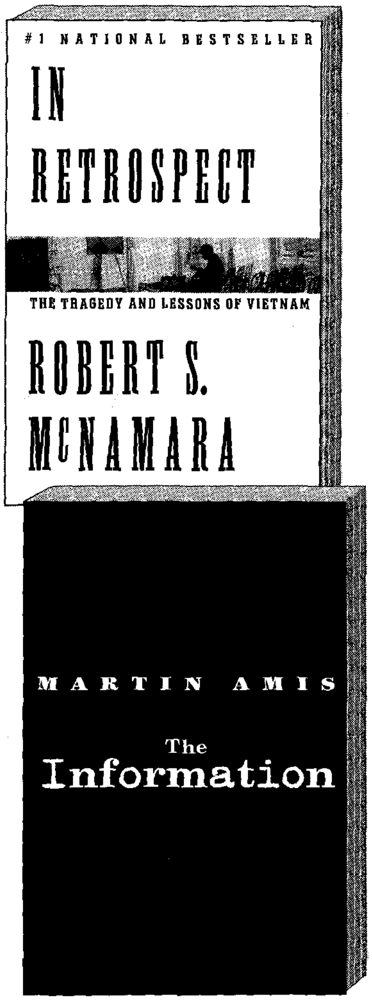

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APRIL 1, 1996

COMMENT Humility and Justice . . . . *Jeffrey Toobin* 7
Is the Menendez conviction part of a trend?

IN THE MAIL 10

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN 16

THE TALK OF THE TOWN 41
Fashionable fakery; the supermarket as melting pot; marijuana is good for you; etc.

DEPARTMENTS

Letter from Washington Accentuate the Negative . . . . *Michael Kelly* 44
Bob Dole finally finds a campaign strategy.

Onward and Upward with the Arts The Playful Pianist . . . . *A. Alvarez* 49
Alfred Brendel is one of the world's great classical musicians—and nothing like what you'd expect.

LETTER FROM TOKYO Nerve Gas and the Four Noble Truths . . . . *Murray Sayle* 56
How did the guru facing trial for murder in the Tokyo nerve-gas attack create himself and a following among the young Japanese élite?

DOWN THE RUNWAY British designer Alexander McQueen . . . . . *Ingrid Sischy* 62

LIFE AND LETTERS Making Advances . . . . *Ian Parker* 72
Harold Robbins is the id of American fiction, on and off the page. Photograph by Helmut Newton.

AT THE GALLERIES Clifford Odets's paintings . . . . *Brendan Lemon* 80

FICTION "New York Girl" . . . . *John Updike* 82
An affair with a woman and the city.

THE CRITICS

A Critic at Large W. H. Auden in New York . . . . *Nicholas Jenkins* 88
Books Sebastian Faulks's "Birdsong" . . . . *Simon Schama* 97
Mixed Media Trash TV polices itself . . . . *James Wolcott* 99
The Current Cinema "Diabolique," "A Family Thing" . . . . . . *Terrence Rafferty* 102

POEMS BY KAY RYAN
"If She Only Had One Minute" 50
"Surfaces" 66
"Why Isn't It All More Marked?" 74

SHOUTS & MURMURS Movie Movie . . . . *Thomas Meehan* 104

COVER *Landmarks Commission to Meet in Special Session, by Bruce McCall*

DRAWINGS *Lee Lorenz, Jack Ziegler, Peter Porges, Mischa Richter, Leo Cullum, Mort Gerberg, Robert Mankoff, Gahan Wilson, J. B. Handelsman, Arnold Roth, Ed Fisher, Victoria Roberts, Bernard Schoenbaum, Roz Chast, Richard Cline, Peter Steiner, Mike Twohy*

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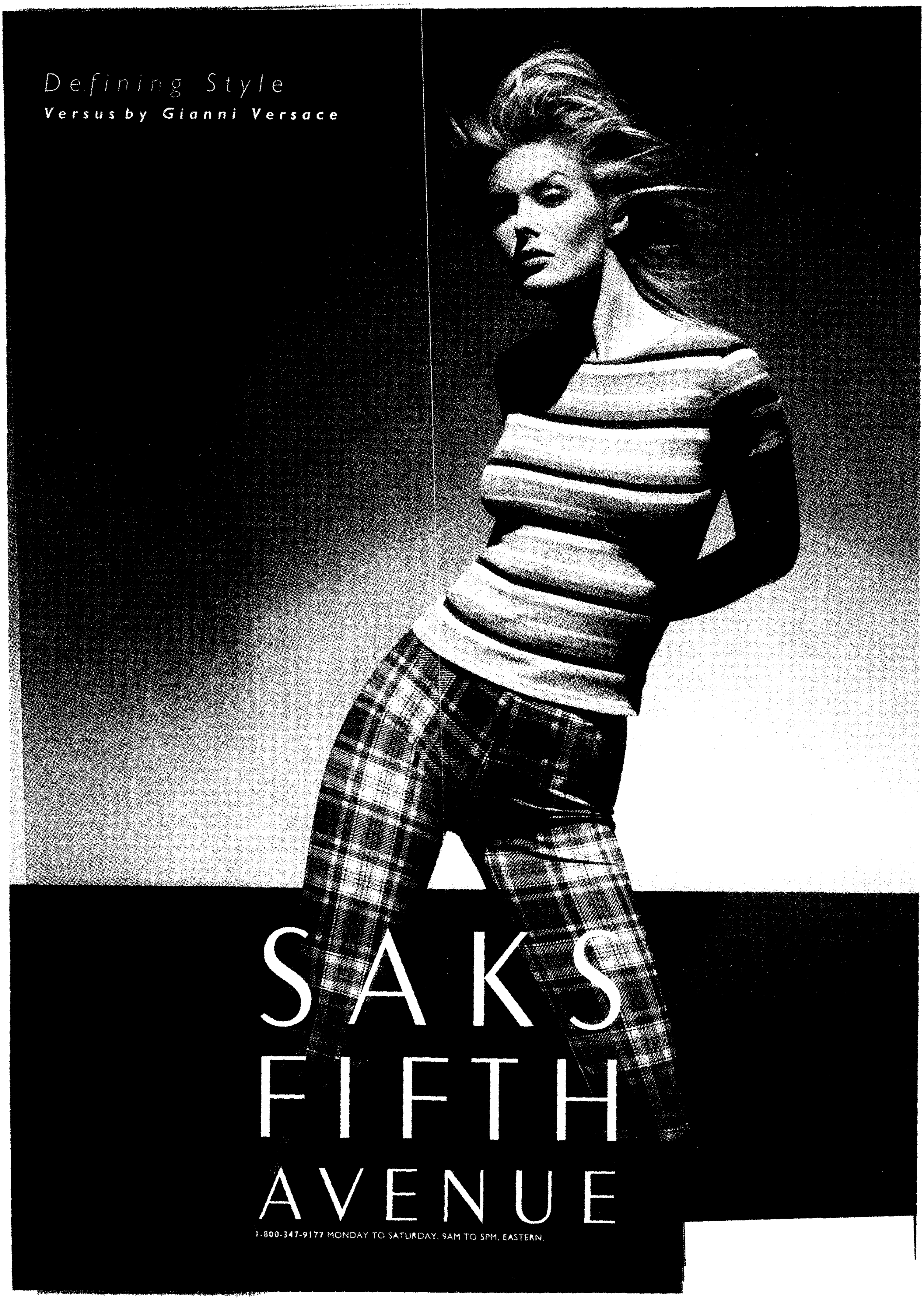
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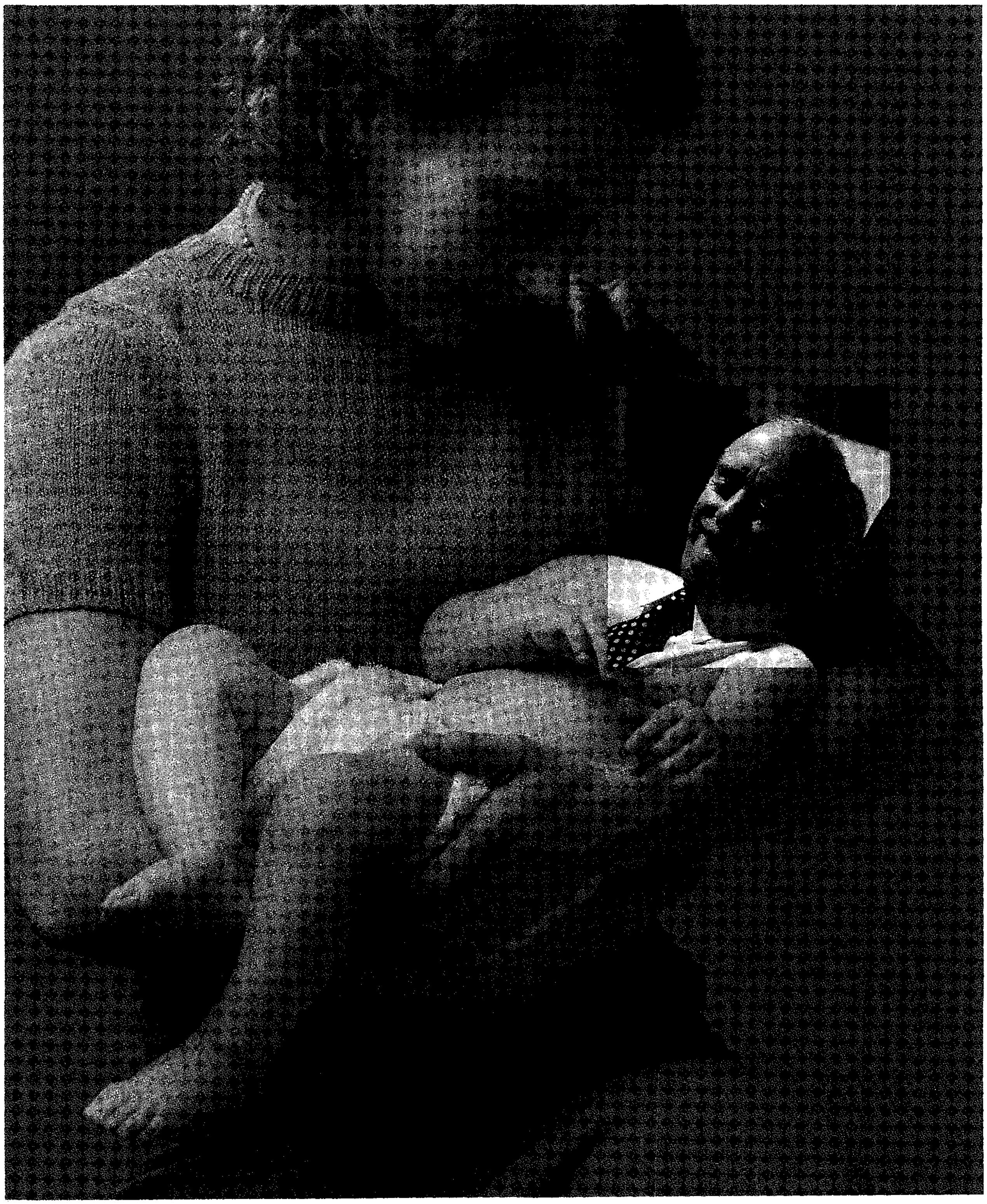

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COMMENT

HUMILITY AND JUSTICE

What people do is a lot clearer than why they do it.

"CONDUCT may be founded on the hard rock or the wet marshes," Nick Carraway observes in "The Great Gatsby," "but after a certain point I don't care what it's founded on." Of course, the sensible Nick was passing judgment on the trail of death and disorder left by F. Scott Fitzgerald's fictional characters, but juries in three recent criminal cases seem, ultimately, to have come down much the same way. They, like young Mr. Carraway, apparently concluded that conduct matters more than whatever may have caused it.

Last week, the legal odyssey of America's most notorious orphans took a long-awaited turn. Lyle and Erik Menendez had never ceased to claim that various forms of paternal mistreatment were what drove them, in 1989, to fire shotgun blasts into the faces of their father and mother in the television room of the family home. But last Wednesday, in Los Angeles, two years after their first trial ended with the jurors hopelessly deadlocked, the Menendez brothers were at last convicted of first-degree murder. The previous Monday, a jury outside Boston, rejecting a plea of not guilty by reason of insanity, found John C. Salvi III guilty of murdering two receptionists at local abortion clinics. And, back on March 7th, a jury in Manhattan convicted Edward J. Leary of attempted murder in connection with two fire-bombings of New York subway trains in December of 1994. Leary, too, had pleaded insanity, arguing that his judgment was clouded by his having taken Prozac in combination with other prescription drugs.

These defendants all admitted performing the acts with which they were charged; they sought exoneration because of what they maintained were the reasons they performed them. The verdicts of the juries in these cases, by holding wrongdoers to a higher standard of accountability for their acts, arguably reflect a salutary aspect of our society's general rightward drift in matters of law and order. The same cannot be said of a pair of measures recently approved by the House and Senate to "reform" the law of habeas corpus. These measures, passed to the accompaniment of much tough-on-crime rhetoric and folded into what are labelled antiterrorism bills, sharply limit the power of federal judges to remedy miscarriages of justice in state courts, where most criminal cases are tried. By forcing the federal courts to defer to state-court interpretations of the federal Bill of Rights, and by curtailing federal judges' inquiries into the facts on which

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state convictions are based, these bills (which are headed for conference) would condemn factually innocent prisoners to unjust imprisonment and, in some cases, execution.

The decline of esoteric causation defenses has some poignancy, because they emerged from honorable impulses. From the beginning, the criminal code has been based upon moral sanction and deterrence. In the nineteenth century, enlightened judges began asking whether the insane—that is, people whose minds did not function logically enough to understand either morality or deterrence—should be punished like other criminals. Such sentiments gave rise to the famous M'Naghten Rule, promulgated in 1843 by the British House of Lords. The rule held that an individual should be found insane if he did "not know the nature and quality of the act he was doing or, if he did know it, that he did not know he was doing what was wrong." The rule was reworded and reformulated over the years. In the nineteen-fifties and sixties, a fad developed for defining an insane act as "the product of mental disease or mental defect." Later, the M'Naghten Rule came back into vogue. Recently, though, the entire squishy enterprise has been called into question.

Part of the difficulty it imposes has to do with nomenclature. Who can doubt that many criminals are, in some colloquial sense, crazy? It was surely a kind of madness that, along with greed, led the Menendez brothers to murder their parents and think they could get away with it. The very act of murder is so deviant, so foreign to normal experience and behavior, that it seems by definition pathological; and the colder, crueller, or ghastlier the crime, the greater the apparent pathology. "He's insane" has the sound of an explanation, but it is more often a confession of bafflement, of an inability to explain the inexplicable. For understandable reasons, judges and juries have always had trouble separating the bizarre or the irrational from the technically insane.

But there is a deeper force at work, too: a new humility on the part of both the legal and the medical communities, and not just in reference to the issue of the insanity defense. There was a time, in the not so distant past, when doctors had great confidence in their ability to define and explain the psychological causes of human behavior. Their assumption was that the forward march of science would soon enable us to identify and, in time, treat and cure the behaviorally afflicted. Judges, too, thought they could instruct jurors with such precision that these citizens would be able to distinguish multiple levels of criminal culpability. All this has proved to be a good deal harder than was expected. To paraphrase Winston Churchill on Clement Attlee, the doctors and lawyers have much to be humble about. We simply do not and probably cannot know with scientific precision why people act the way they do. Some people have bad parents; others may have bad genes; still others may be—as Andrew Delbanco wisely reminds us in his recent book "The Death of Satan"—simply evil.

A like humility should have a place in the debate about habeas corpus. The legal system does make mistakes, and innocent people are sometimes convicted. Since the nation's founding, it has been the responsibility of the federal courts to stand watch for these mistakes. No brisk concern for efficiency justifies reducing that noble obligation. Criminal trials are a reasonably good (not perfect) method of weighing the facts of a case as they are presented in court. It may be too much to ask them to do more, but they shouldn't be allowed to do less.

To be sure, we will never be able to banish completely from our criminal courts the slippery business of mind reading. The battered woman who kills in self-defense, the reckless driver who kills a pedestrian, the hired assassin who kills for pay: though each of them has taken a life, there are differences among their acts—differences that come under the legal rubric of "intent." The law can and should treat these homicides and their perpetrators differently. But the "why" of murder may remain ultimately unknowable. When we take what Fitzgerald called "privileged glimpses into the human heart," it is not always clear what we see. —JEFFREY TOOBIN

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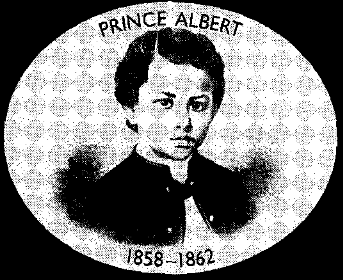

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IN THE MAIL

THE COST OF SAFETY

Noelle Oxenhandler's "The Eros of Parenthood" (February 19th) was at best irritating and at worst dangerous. All reputable research on the topic of incest and the sexual abuse of children suggests a widespread problem in Western cultures. If, in order to keep some children safe, coaches and teachers must forgo hugging, so be it. Sexual abuse is much too devastating a form of victimization to be casually brushed aside, and, frankly, I would rather err in the direction of caution. If parents aren't sure whether they can still rub lotion on their babies' bottoms, maybe they shouldn't be parents.

ELIZABETH KANDEL ENGLANDER
Dept. of Psychology
Bridgewater State College
Bridgewater, Mass.

I am old enough to remember when the spectacle of a male athlete hugging another male athlete who had just made points for his team would have been unthinkable. Nowadays, however, I imagine that the athletes' insurance companies are obliged to specify what happens when a football player who has just scored a touchdown is injured by his teammates' overenthusiastic embraces. It is ironic that, just when Americans are becoming more tolerant of physical contact, the media have been regaling us with tales of adults in positions of authority who are alleged to have sexually abused children. Just when we are recognizing that the very young need the reassurance of physical contact as much as they need food and sleep, many kindergarten and first-grade teachers are being made increasingly aware that if they provide such contact they stand a good chance of being fired.

FRANK HOLAN
Westminster, Vt.

Without denying that abuse exists, I agree with Ms. Oxenhandler that the pendulum has swung too far, and that denying parent-child sexuality—indeed, human sexuality—threatens to cause a far greater harm: the one that grows from neglect, indifference, and distrust. I am a single father who enjoys joint custody of a delightful five-year-old daughter. One evening, as she lay sleeping, I was suddenly overcome by an urge (hormonal, I'm sure) to get up from the couch, where I had been watching television, walk down the hall to her room, and check to see if she was O.K., still alive, still breathing. I crouched down next to her mouth and listened carefully until I was satisfied that she was safe. I have done the same with lovers in my life.

BRAD G. GARBER
Portland, Ore.

FOOD FIGHT

John Updike's Shouts & Murmurs, "Paranoid Packaging" (February 19th), was very clever, but it didn't go far enough—to the conspiracy. I've been noticing the packaging problem for some time; often I need to use knives, scissors, and even pliers to open containers of food. We hear that the young resent us old people because they think we'll use up Social Security, Medicare, etc., before they can get any of these benefits. So what could be more reasonable than that young people will one day sneak in and take all the tools we need to open our food, leaving us to starve? I have alerted my friends.

BARBARA M. GOLD
Edmonds, Wash.

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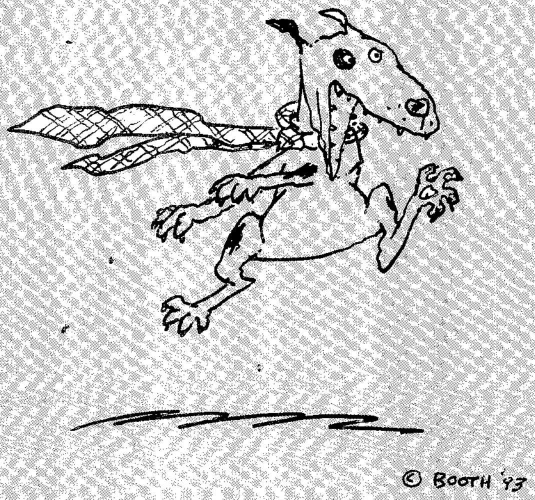

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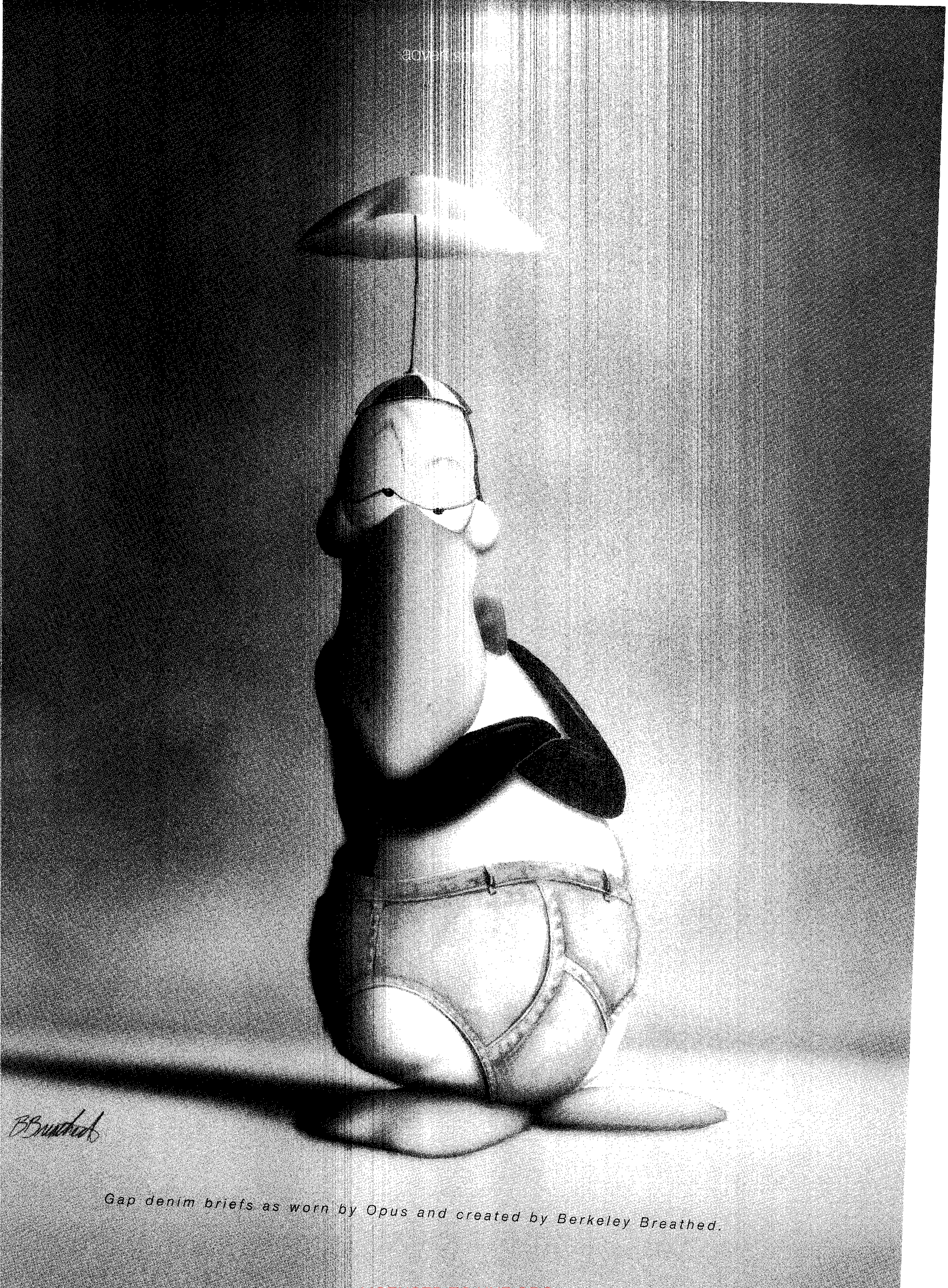

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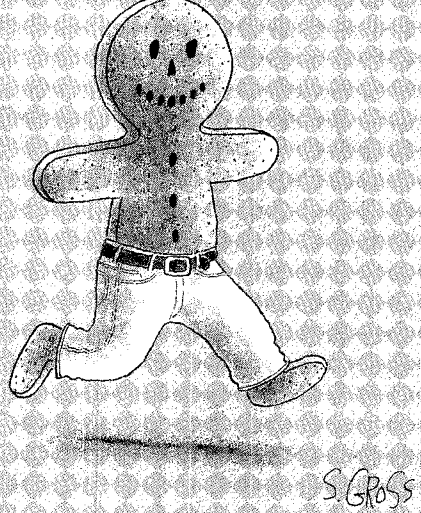

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GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

THE THEATRE

Wait Not, Want Not

Wait around for the reviews of some of the musicals set to open on Broadway next month, and you may wind up having to wait a lot longer to score tickets. "A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum" is hot already, thanks to the star presence of Nathan ("The Birdcage") Lane; even if the show gets tepid notices, they're not likely to cool things down. Rodgers and Hammerstein's "The King and I" should be nearly as critic-proof, but the new stage version of their 1945 movie, "State Fair," may not be: the cast (John Davidson, Kathryn Crosby) sounds more dinner theatre than Broadway. If you got shut out of the downtown runs of "Bring In 'da Noise, Bring In 'da Funk" and "Rent," you'd better book now if you want to see them before the summer—if "Rent" wins a Pulitzer Prize in April, it could become as tough a ticket as it was at New York Theatre Workshop. And speaking of tough tickets, this week the terrific Encores! series at City Center, in which big-name performers haul out classic and sometimes neglected scores in concert settings, presents Melissa Errico in the Kurt Weill–Ogden Nash–S. J. Perelman musical "One Touch of Venus."

OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

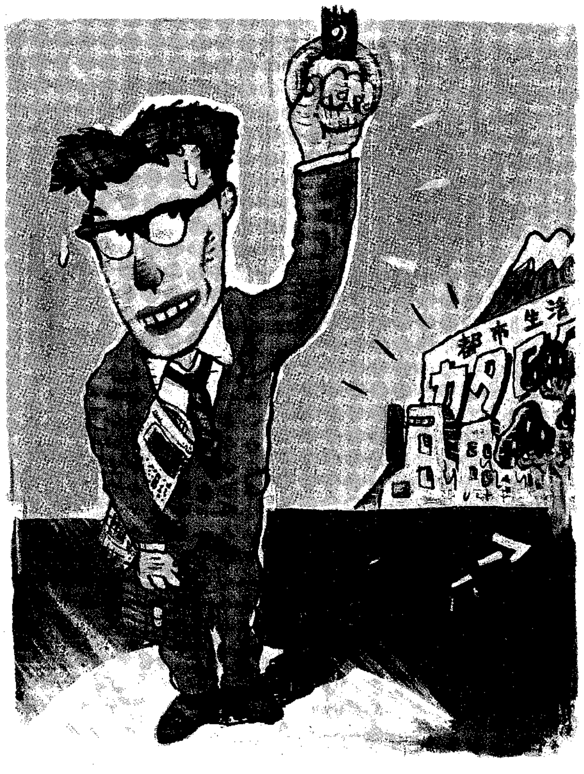
(Please call the phone number listed with the theatre for timetables and ticket information.)

A Catalogue of City Life—Japanese comedian Issey Ogata portrays an array of angst-ridden urbanites in his solo show. Performances are in Japanese with simultaneous English translation. March 26-28 at 8. (Japan Society, 333 E. 47th St. 752-3015.)

Cowgirls—Country and classical collide in a new musical comedy, in which a country-music hall mistakenly books a chamber trio for its grand reopening. In previews through March 31. Opens April 1 at 6:30. (Minetta Lane Theatre, 18 Minetta Lane, east of Sixth Ave., between W. 3rd and Bleecker Sts. 420-8000.)

A Delicate Balance—Lincoln Center Theatre presents Edward Albee's 1966 unbalanced-family drama. With John Cunningham, George Grizzard, Rosemary Harris, Mary Beth Hurt, Elaine Stritch, and Elizabeth Wilson. Previews begin March 28. (Plymouth, 236 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum—Nathan Lane is the Roman slave Pseudolus, in a revival of the 1962 Stephen Sondheim–Burt Shevelove–Larry Gelbart musical. Directed by Jerry Zaks, with choreography by Rob Marshall. In previews. (St. James, 246 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)



Issey Ogata, in "A Catalogue of City Life."

TAKESHI TAKATSU

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Grand Hotel des Étrangers—A troubled writer holes up in a hotel for a night, in this dream play by the Canadian multimedia artists Victor Pilon and Michel Lemieux. March 29-30 at 8. (Florence Gould Hall, 55 E. 59th St. 355-6160.)

How He Lied to Her and **Village Wooing**—The National Asian-American Theatre Company presents two one-acts by Shaw. Previews March 27-28. Opens March 29 at 8. (Vineyard's 26th St. theatre, 309 E. 26th St. 505-3003.)

I Do! I Do!—Tom Jones and Harvey Schmidt's 1964 musical comedy about marriage. Two previews on March 27. Opens March 28 at 7:30. (Lamb's, 130 W. 44th St. 997-1780.)

The King and I—A revival of the 1950 Rodgers and Hammerstein musical. Christopher Renshaw directs. In previews. (Neil Simon, 250 W. 52nd St. 307-4100.)

Life Is a Dream—Calderón's 1635 drama, about a prince imprisoned by his father since birth, in a Pearl Theatre Company production. In previews through March 30. Opens March 31 at 2. (80 St. Marks Pl. 598-9802.)

A Midsummer Night's Dream—The Royal Shakespeare Company brings the comedy to town for a ten-week engagement. Directed by Adrian Noble. In previews through March 30. Opens March 31 at 5. (Lunt-Fontanne, 205 W. 46th St., 307-4100.)

One Touch of Venus—A concert version of the Kurt Weill–Ogden Nash–S. J. Perelman musical. Four performances only: March 28-29 at 8 and March 30 at 2 and 8. (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212.)

Seven Guitars—August Wilson's new play, set in Pittsburgh in 1948, examines the final days in the life of a blues guitarist (Keith David). Lloyd Richards is the director. Two previews on March 27. Opens March 28 at 8. (Walter Kerr, 219 W. 48th St. 239-6200.)

The Shattering—A family's naïve support of a third-party presidential candidate brings about its collapse. Written by Mark R. Shapiro. In previews through April 1. Opens April 2 at 7. (Players, 115 Macdougal St. 239-6200.)

State Fair—A stage version of the 1945 Rodgers and Hammerstein movie musical. Directed by James Hammerstein and Randy Skinner. Opens March 27 at 6:30. (Music Box, 239 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

Victor; or, Children Take Over—The Arden Party Theatre Company presents the French surrealist Roger Vitrac's satire of nineteen-twenties bourgeois society. Opens March 27 at 8. (Ohio Theatre, 66 Wooster St. 969-0551.)

Zombie Prom—A new nineteen-fifties rock-and-roll musical. In previews. (Variety Arts, Third Ave. at 14th St. 239-6200.)

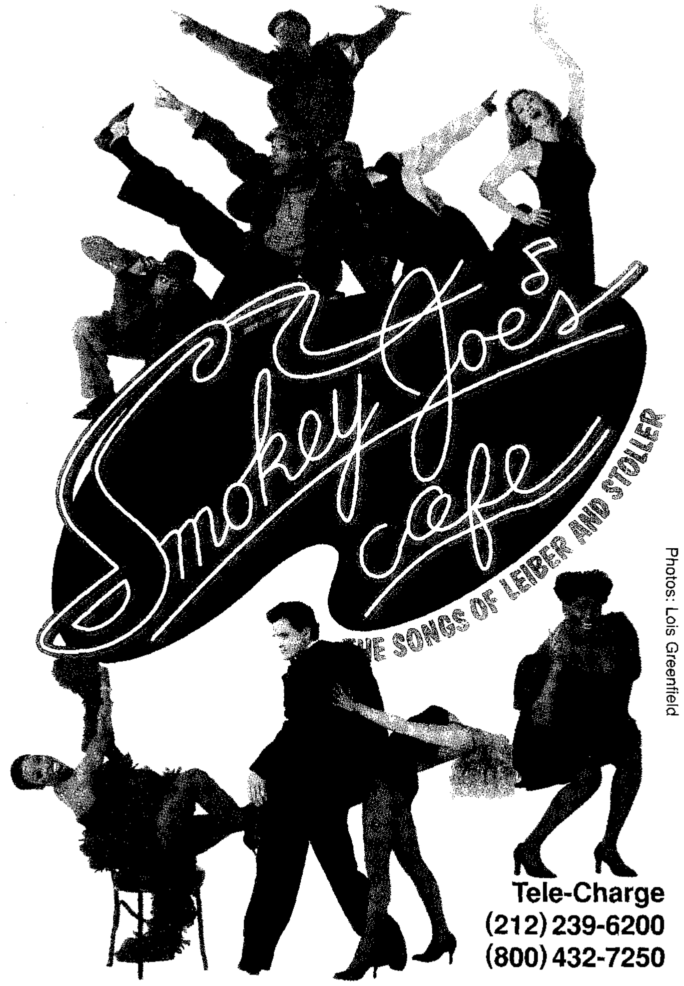
OPENED RECENTLY

Andrea Martin and **Marga Gomez**—Two solo shows—"Nude Nude Totally Nude," Martin's new multicharacter comedy, and "A Line Around the Block," Gomez's tribute to her father, the Cuban entertainer Willy Chevalier. (Public, 425 Lafayette St. 260-2400.)

Bein' with Behan—In his portrayal of the late poet, playwright, and political activist Brendan Behan, the talented and hardworking Irish actor Michael L. Kavanagh pauses only long enough to take the occasional gargle of Guinness. But the audience doesn't have the solace of a pint during this formulaic two-hour pub monologue, and while Kavanagh clearly knows the terrain and characters whereof he speaks, a lad might do better to take his Behan straight. (Irish Repertory Theatre, 132 W. 22nd St. 279-4200.)

Below the Belt—Richard Dresser's brilliant dark comedy is set in "an industrial compound in a distant land," but it hits close to home in its dead-on absurdist take on modern life. Judd Hirsch, Robert Sean Leonard, and Jude Ciccolella are three men who work for a company that makes "units." (Units of what, you ask? Don't ask.) Dresser's dialogue sharply and resonantly limns their paranoia. You may wish for slightly sharper performances from the actors, but the production, under the direction of Gloria Muzio, and especially the vividly drab set and costumes, are nevertheless very satisfying. (John Houseman, 450 W. 42nd St. 239-6200.)

Bomber Jackets—A brief relationship between a gang member and a transvestite results in violence, in a new drama by Rob Santana, presented by the Puerto Rican Traveling Theatre. Performances are in English Wednesdays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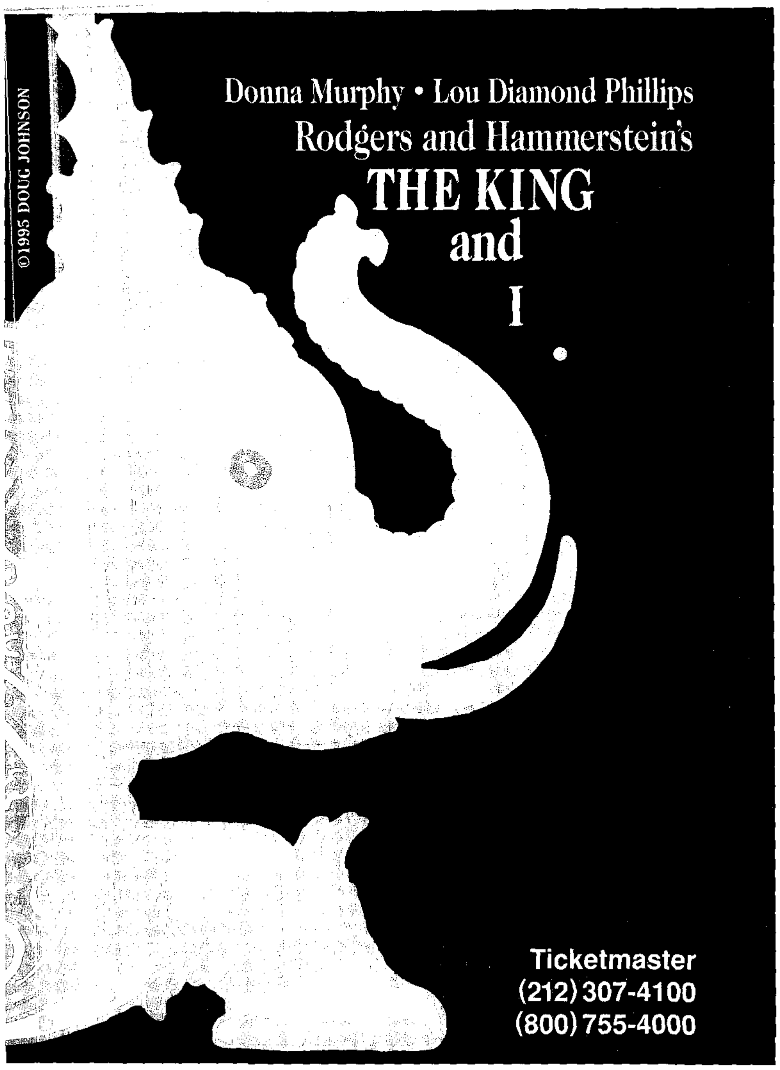
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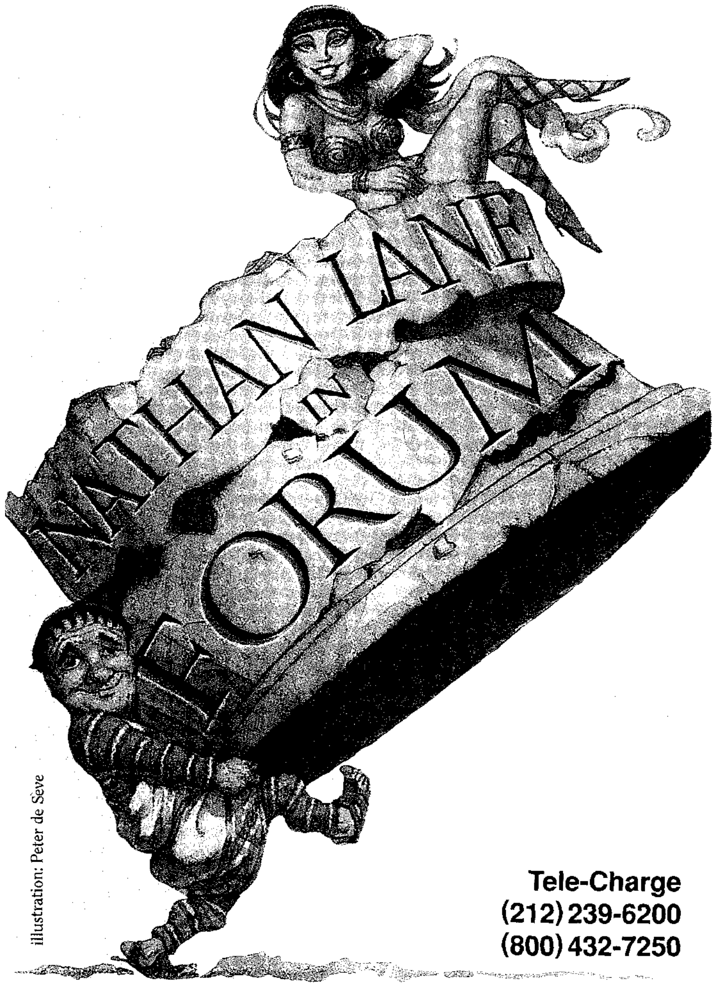
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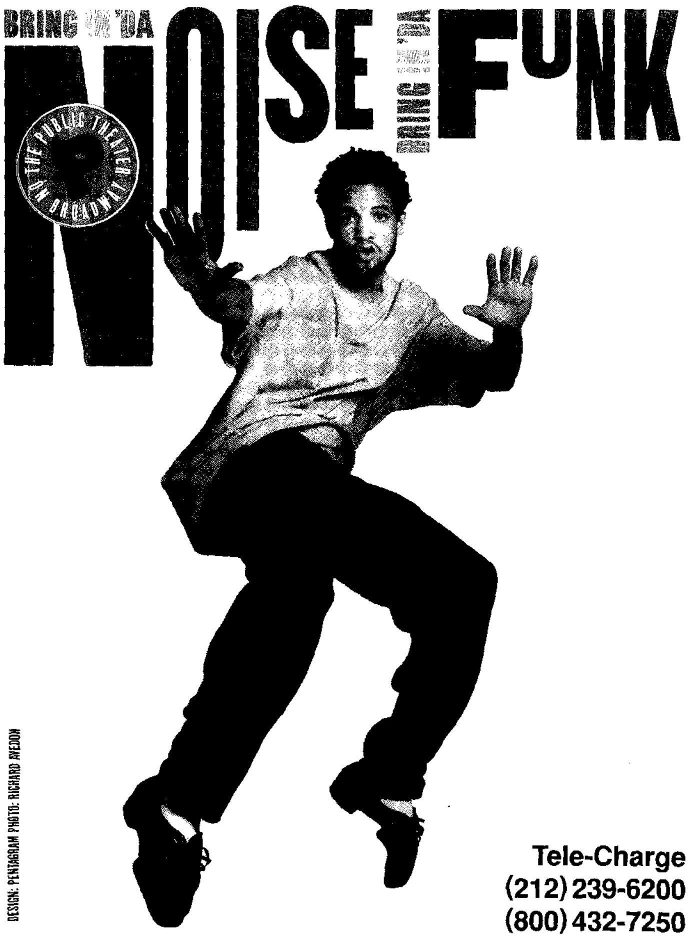
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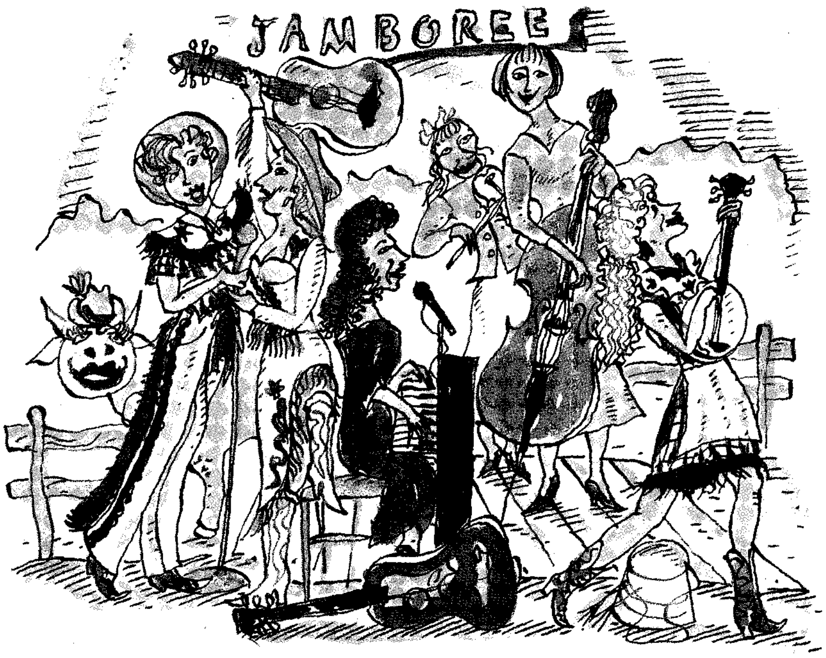


"Cowgirls," at Minetta Lane Theatre.

through Fridays and in Spanish on Saturdays and Sundays. (304 W. 47th St. 354-1293.)

Call Me Sarah Bernhardt—The latest from Everett Quinton and the Ridiculous Theatrical Company. (P.S. 122, 150 First Ave., at 9th St. 477-5288. Closes March 31.)

Ensemble Studio Theatre—Presenting an evening of one-acts by David Mamet. (549 W. 52nd St. 247-3405. Closes April 7.)

A Fair Country—In John Robin Baitz's new play, a well-meaning American diplomat (Laurence Luckinbill) in South Africa and The Hague sets in motion an unseen but horrifying course of events when he takes steps to keep his family from disintegrating. Thematically, the play, directed by Daniel Sullivan, is a very neat package, but emotionally it rings hollow, and it isn't helped by several uneven performances. Tony Walton's set, however, is a triumph. (3/11/96) (Mitzi E. Newhouse, Lincoln Center. 239-6200.)

Forbidden Hollywood—The revue format of Gerard Alessandrini's movie-biz sendup is by nature hit or miss. The many hits include a sloshed Pat and Dick Nixon going on about Oliver Stone. The most conspicuous miss is an impersonation of Demi Moore, whose imperviousness to caricature says much about the nature of her stardom. (Triad, 158 W. 72nd St. 799-4599.)

Getting Away With Murder—Not quite: this dreadful Stephen Sondheim–George Furth play closes March 31. (Broadhurst, 235 W. 44th St. 239-6200.)

Inherit the Wind—A National Actors Theatre revival of the 1955 drama about the Scopes "monkey trial." Directed by John Tillinger. (Royale, 242 W. 45th St. 239-6280. Closes April 14.)

The Looking Lass—A satire, à la Lewis Carroll, of the 1996 Presidential campaigns. Thursdays at 9; through April 4. (Westbeth Theatre Center, 151 Bank St. 741-0391.)

Love Thy Neighbor—Jackie Mason returns to Broadway, with the Boys Choir of Harlem, in a new one-man show (of sorts). (Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

Master Class—Zoe Caldwell portrays Maria Callas with steely, divaesque conviction in Terrence McNally's latest play, but the role is merely the sum of all the clichés that have been in circulation for years. Leonard Foglia directed. (11/27/95) (Golden, 252 W. 45th St. 239-6200.)

Mr. Budhoo's Letter of Resignation from the I.M.F.—Peter Schumann and his Bread and Puppet Theatre offer a new rendition of their political play. (Theatre for the New City, 155 First Ave., at 10th St. 254-1109. Closes March 30.)

Mrs. Klein—Two London psychoanalysts—the famous Melanie Klein (Uta Hagen) and her less renowned daughter, Melitta (Laila Robins)—face off in a murderous argument and proceed to browbeat each other with theory in Nicholas Wright's smart though schematic drama. Robins is excellent; Hagen is brilliant. (11/20/95) (Lucille Lortel, 121 Christopher St. 239-6200.)

Molly Sweeney—Brian Friel's 1994 play owes much to an Oliver Sacks case study, but Friel didn't reimagine the material, and the play, which he directed, comes across as a staged reading of an essay. (1/29/96) (Laura Pels, Broadway at 45th St. 869-8400.)

The Night of the Iguana—Cherry Jones, Marsha Mason, and William Petersen star in the Roundabout Theatre's revival of Tennessee Williams's 1961 play. Directed by Robert Falls. (Broadway at 45th St. 869-8400.)

Nixon's Nixon—On the eve of his resignation, the thirty-seventh president and his secretary of state uncork the brandy decanter and spill a few secrets about power as they have known it. The script, by Russell Lees, has its share of dead spots, but the performers—Gerry Bamman as Nixon and Steve Mellor as Kissinger—are always engaging and sometimes masterful. Directed by Jim Simpson. (Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 315-2244.)

No Exit—Sartre's 1945 existentialist drama. (House of Candles Theatre, 99 Stanton St. 353-3088.)

Overtime—A. R. Gurney's latest, a modern "sequel" to "The Merchant of Venice," asks the Rodney King question "Can we all get along?" This time around, Portia (wonderfully played by Joan McMurtrey) is an echt-Wasp party giver, Salerio (the excellent Robert Stanton) an uptight accountant in a Brooks Brothers suit, Shylock (Nicholas Kepros) a sweet old mensch—you get the picture. Gurney takes aim at every imaginable stereotype, and about half the time he hits his target. (Manhattan Theatre Club, at City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 581-1212. Closes April 14.)

Picasso at the Lapin Agile—Set in a Paris bar in 1904, Steve Martin's comedy features Einstein and Picasso sittin' around talkin' about how they're going to change the world. It contains a satisfying amount of Martin's coolly absurdist humor—but there's a certain sourness to the proceedings which may put you off. (Promenade, Broadway at 76th St. 239-6200.)

Rent—Inspired by Puccini's "La Bohème," the late Jonathan Larson's rock opera, set in a gray and dishevelled East Village loft space, stands every assumption of the traditional musical on its head. It can't support the narrative overload (eight separate stories are told), yet by the end of the evening, Larson's talent has taken the audience to places where the musical never ventures these days. (2/19/96) (New York Theatre Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 460-5475. The play closes here on March 31 and moves to Broadway's Nederlander Theatre on April 16.)

Sabina—Willy Holtzman has based this ambitious, intelligent new drama on Aldo Carotenuto's 1982 book, "A Secret Symmetry," which revealed Sabina Spielrein's previously all but unknown contributions to Carl Jung's work. The psychoanalyst's first private patient, she went on to become not only his protégée and lover but also a brilliant exponent of Freud. Holtzman offers poetic insights into ways that the two men's theories augured the behavior that would allow them to betray her. In spite of some necessarily turgid jargon, the drama re-creates the analytic process beautifully, thanks to a sleek production, elegant direction by Melia Bensussen, and some fine performances, especially by Marin Hinkle, in the title role, and David Adkins, as the analyst Ludwig Binswanger. (Primary Stages, 354 W. 45th St. 333-4052. Closes April 7.)

The Size of the World—An eccentric New Jersey family alters a young man's notion of the American Dream, in a new comedy by Charles Evered. (Circle Repertory Company, 159 Bleecker St. 239-6200. Closes April 7.)

The Sun Dialogues—The Adobe Theatre Company presents a black comedy by David Hollander, about an obsessed Hollywood script reader. (46 Walker St. 560-7387. Closes April 6.)

Tartuffe—Jean Cocteau Repertory presents Richard Wilbur's translation of Molière's 1664 comedy, which will run in rotating repertory with Shaw's "Major Barbara." (Bouwerie Lane Theatre, 330 Bowery, at Bond St. 677-0060.)

The Universe—The Ontological-Hysteric Theatre's latest mind-wrenching vaudeville. (St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. 533-4650. Closes March 31.)

Victor/Victoria—Julie Andrews, Tony Roberts, and Michael Nouri star in a theatrical version of the 1982 movie. The score (by Henry Mancini) is generic, and the book (by Blake Edwards, who also directed) is patchwork. The leggy Rachel York, as a blond bimbo, at least enjoys herself—and the audience enjoys her, too. (11/20/95) (Marquis, Broadway at 45th St. 307-4100.)

Virgins and Other Myths—Colin Martin's one-man show closes here on March 31 and moves to the Atlantic on April 12. (Primary Stages, 354 W. 45th St. 333-4052.)

A Whistle in the Dark—David Leary is electric as the patriarch of a clan of Irish brawlers in early-sixties England. Frightened by his own failure, this man has taught his sons that the only way to live is to fight—everywhere, all the time—a philosophy that leads to tragedy when one son questions it. Thomas Murphy's 1961 play begins slowly, but the acting is solid throughout. (Irish Repertory Theatre, 132 W. 22nd St. 727-2737. Closes March 31.)

Working Title—A screenwriter tries to hold his crumbling career and marriage together, in a new comedy by Andrew Bergman. (American Jewish Theatre, 307 W. 26th St. 633-9797.)

LONG RUNS

AFTER-PLAY: Theatre Four, 424 W. 55th St. 239-6200. . . . **BEAUTY AND THE BEAST:** Palace, Broadway at 47th St. 307-4100. . . . **BLUE MAN GROUP/TUBES:** Astor Place Theatre, 434 Lafayette St. 254-4370. . . . **CATS:** Winter Garden, Broadway at 50th St. 239-6200. . . . **THE FANTASTICKS:** Sullivan Street Playhouse, 181 Sullivan St., at Bleecker St. 674-3838. . . . **THE FOOD CHAIN:** Westside, 407 W. 43rd St. 307-4100. . . . **GRANDMA SYLVIA'S FUNERAL:** SoHo Playhouse, 15 Vandam St. 691-1555. . . . **GREASE!:** Eugene O'Neill, 230 W. 49th St. 239-6200. . . . **HOW TO SUCCEED IN BUSINESS WITHOUT REALLY TRYING:** Richard Rodgers, 226 W. 46th St. 307-4100. . . . **LES MISÉRABLES:** Imperial, 249 W. 45th St. 239-6200. . . . **MISS SAIGON:** Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 239-6200. . . . **MOON OVER BUFFALO:** Martin Beck, 302 W. 45th St. 239-6200. . . . **PERFECT CRIME:** Duffy, 1553 Broadway, at 46th St. 695-3401. . . . **THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA:** Majestic, 245 W. 44th St. 239-6200. . . . **ROB BECKER'S DEFENDING THE CAVEMAN:** Helen Hayes, 240 W. 44th St. 307-4100. . . . **SHOW BOAT:** Gershwin, 51st St. west of Broadway. 307-

4100. . . . **SMOKEY JOE'S CAFÉ:** Virginia, 245 W. 52nd St. 239-6200. . . . **STOMP:** Orpheum, 126 Second Ave., at St. Marks Pl. 477-2477. . . . **SUNSET BOULEVARD:** Minskoff, 45th St. west of Broadway. 307-4007. . . . **TONY N' TINA'S WEDDING:** St. John's Church, 81 Christopher St. 279-4200.

DANCE

FELD BALLETS/NY—March 27 at 8: "La Vida," "Clave," "Gnossiennes," and "The Jig Is Up.". . . ¶ March 28 at 8: "The Grand Canon," "Santa Fe Saga," "Asia," and "Doo Dah Day." . . . ¶ March 29 at 8: "Ah Scarlatti," "Ion," "Ogive," and "Paper Tiger." . . . ¶ March 30 at 2 and March 31 at noon: "Kids Dance," featuring repertory works performed by dancers chosen from local schools. . . . ¶ March 30 at 8: "Consort," "Chi," "Charmed Lives," and "Paean." . . . ¶ March 31 at 4 (a benefit): "Paean," "Meshugana Dance," and "Paper Tiger." (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 242-0800.)

NEW YORK CITY BALLET—The company leaves its home borough for two days to perform excerpts from repertory works, including "Agon," "Chaconne," and "Dvořák Bagatelles." A discussion with the dancers punctuates each performance. (Queens College, 65-30 Kissena Blvd., Flushing. 1-718 793-8080. March 30 at 2. . . . ¶ Brooklyn Academy of Music, 30 Lafayette Ave. 307-4100. March 31 at 3.)

"MY HOUSE WAS COLLAPSING TOWARD ONE SIDE"—Dancer and performance artist Dawn Akemi Saito and director Charles L. Mee, Jr., collaborate on a full-length work combining Saito's *butoh* dance with texts by a tenth-century Japanese courtesan and testimonials from Hiroshima survivors. (Dance Theatre Workshop, 219 W. 19th St. 924-0077. March 28-30 at 8 and March 31 at 3. Through April 7.)

NANCY MEEHAN DANCE COMPANY—For its twenty-fourth season, the seven-member company presents two recent works, "Crossings in a Mountain Dream" and "Record of an Ocean Cliff," and an untitled première. (St. Mark's In-the-Bouwerie, Second Ave. at 10th St. 674-8194. March 29-31 at 8:30.)

"THREE"—Solo works by Yasuko Yokoshi, Claude Wampler, and Li Chao Ping. Ms. Ping will also collaborate with Sally Silvers in a new duet. (P.S. 122, 150 First Ave., at 9th St. 477-5288. March 28-31 at 9.)

BARNARD COLLEGE DANCE CONCERT—The faculty and guest choreographers of the Barnard dance department practice what they teach: Donlin Foreman presents "Five Songs" and a solo; Katiti King offers "Estuary"; Kraig Patterson performs his solo "Flys" and premières a work for ten dancers set to the music of Alanis Morrisette and PJ Harvey; and Janet Soares presents "For Six." (Miller Theatre, Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. 854-7799. March 29-30 at 8.)

"URBAN DANDELIONS"—Marlies Yearby, the choreographer of "Rent," curates the first program of the Thelma Hill Performing Arts Center's twentieth season, with Creative Outlet (under the direction of Jamel Gaines), Nia Love & Co., the Seventh Principle, and Stephanie Tooman of the Reggie Wilson/Fist and Heel Performance Company. (Triangle Theatre, Flatbush and DeKalb Aves., Brooklyn. 1-718 875-9710. March 30 at 8 and March 31 at 2 and 7.)

"DANCING FOR THE YARD"—Dance alumnae of The Yard, the Martha's Vineyard arts colony, present their annual benefit performance, with José Limon dancer Roxanne D'Orleans-Juste, Linda Tarnay, Neta Pulvermacher & Co., Leajato Robinson, and Joy Kellman & Co. (Dia Center for the Arts, 155 Mercer St. For more information, call 1-508 645-9662. March 31 at 3.)

LAURA STATON DANCE—The choreographer and Sally Silvers dancer presents two new works: the trio "Fates Furious Graces" and "Solo for Arlene Croce." (Judson Memorial Church, 55 Washington Sq. S. 477-6854. April 1 at 8.)

NIGHT LIFE

CONCERTS

TRISHA YEARWOOD—Since her hit-filled début in 1991, this powerful singer has been an inspiration to every starry-eyed female vocalist in Nashville. She brings a rare sense of integrity to the music, which her "new country" admirers would do well to emulate. Her upcoming album features work by such stellar composers as Janis Ian and Sam Phillips—people who write from the heart, not the purse. With rugged balladeer Collin Raye. (Westbury Music Fair. 1-516 334-0800. March 27 at 8.)

TABLES FOR TWO

Dining around town

TURKISH KITCHEN, 386 Third Ave. at 27th St. (679-1810)—For the past three years Turkish Kitchen has been fighting to transcend what may be the drabbest name in the city. There is nothing drab about the rest of the place. The service is swashbuckling; the red-gold-blue-and-violet walls are adorned with dazzling kilims and illuminated manuscripts. And the owners are so confident that they've adopted "World Famous Turkish Restaurant" as their motto and filled their menus with more flattering reviews than a week's worth of Siskel and Ebert.

The joint is always packed. On a recent weekday evening, Turkish families, Japanese businessmen, and Swiss industrialists all munched together comfortably. Istanbul disco percolated in the background. A basket of hot *pide* bread arrived at the table and practically demanded a cold bottle of *kavaklidere*, a tart Turkish wine.

As in most of the cuisines from this part of the world, charcoal grilling plays a major role: swordfish, octopus, and brook trout are all blackened and juicy. Baked lamb comes wrapped in eggplant or thinly sliced in a garlic-yogurt sauce. *Tavuklu adana*, a chopped-chicken-and-red-pepper number, is set off with a foot-long hot pepper and a salad of parsley and onions garnished with cumin and lemon juice. Fearless young Turks temper the garlic-and-pepper onslaught with *cacik*, a homemade yogurt that soothes the tongue and the upper G.I. tract. The dessert tray teems with honey-drenched baklava, almond pudding, and poached apricots stuffed with cream and crushed pistachios; the Turkish coffee is thicker than mud from the bottom of the Bosporus. (Open weekdays for lunch and dinner, weekends for dinner only. Entrées $12-$17.)

TIM MCGRAW—Today's country audiences like their stars to be party animals on the outside and pussycats on the inside. McGraw (the son of former Mets pitcher Tug McGraw) has been filling that bill for the past few years. His 1994 album, "Not a Moment Too Soon," sold more than five million copies; his latest, "All I Want," is off to a similar start. No wonder he's calling this the Spontaneous Combustion Tour. He plays at the Theatre at Madison Square Garden, formerly known as the Paramount. (465-6080. March 28 at 8.)

JAZZ PASSENGERS / DEBORAH HARRY—Though they still enjoy a joke more than your average band does, these days the Passengers take themselves quite seriously as musicians—a focus that has helped them survive while other eighties downtown groups have fallen. At their least affected, they make clever, uncategorizable music. Harry is of course best known as the New Wave pinup who sang Blondie's sugar-shock pop songs in the late seventies and early eighties. She's been a solo artist for more than a decade now, and although her second career hasn't yielded many hits she still has a classic voice and excellent taste. (Town Hall, 123 W. 43rd St. 840-2824. March 29 at 8.)

LOU REED—New York's finest monotonic rock singer returns to the concert stage with a bundle of new songs from "Set the Twilight Reeling"—his first new album since he released "Magic and Loss" and a career anthology, "Between Thought and Expression," in 1992, and the first since he fell for his latest muse, Laurie Anderson. He sounds like a man who's getting "a fourteenth chance at this life," as he sings in a tune called "Trade In," and if the sonically primitive rock-and-roll animal hasn't mellowed, he's nevertheless in a romantic and openhearted mood. With Luna. (Beacon Theatre, Broadway at 74th St. 496-7070. March 31 at 8.)

"JOHNNY MERCER & HIS LEGACY"—A salute to the great Savannah songwriter, with performances by Margaret Whiting, Judy Kuhn, Marilyn Volpe, and others. (Alice Tully Hall. 875-5050. March 31 at 8.)

B. B. KING / BOBBY (BLUE) BLAND / RUTH BROWN—What with King's swinging night-club act, Bland's from-the-pulpit fire, and Brown's theatrical blues, this gig is a crash course in R. & B. history. You'd be hard pressed to find a better trio of instructors. (Westbury Music Fair. March 31 at 3 and 7.)

JACKSON BROWNE—On his 1976 album, "The Pretender," this former poster boy for the West Coast school of introspective songwriting longed to lift the weight of existence from his shoulders so he could be "a happy idiot and struggle for the legal tender." On his new release, "Looking East," he now says, "I want to live in the world, not inside my head . . . I want to stand with the hopeful and the willing." It's the story of his career: from a yuppie before his time to a hippie after it. In the words of his old labelmates, welcome to the Hotel California. With singer-songwriter Vonda Shepard. (Beacon Theatre. April 2 at 8.)

CLUBS

(A highly arbitrary listing, in which boldface type indicates some of the more notable performers in town. Musicians and night-club proprietors live complicated lives; it is advisable to call ahead to confirm engagements.)

BLARNEY STAR, 43 Murray St. (732-2873)—Home to fine Irish music every Friday night.

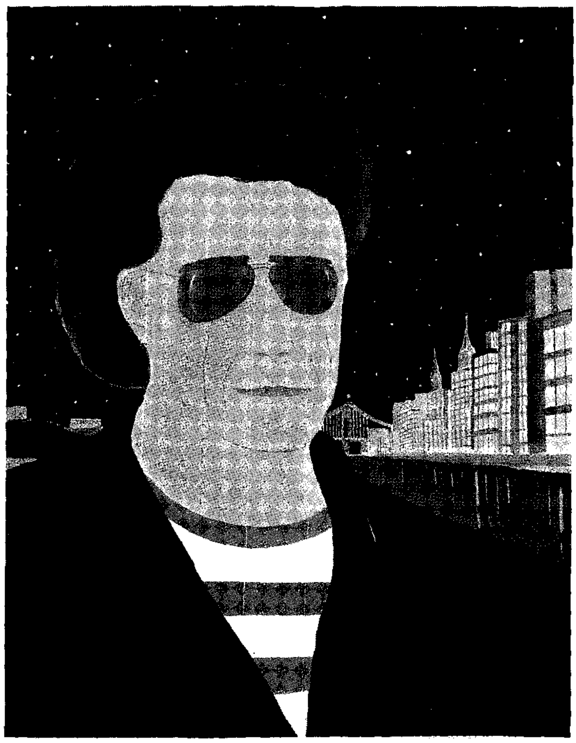
BOTTOM LINE, 15 W. 4th St., at Mercer St. (228-6300)—March 30: Buster Poindexter & His Banshees of Blue.

BROWNIES, 169 Avenue A, at 10th St. (420-8392)—March 30: Life in a Blender.

CAFÉ SIN-É, 122 St. Marks Pl. (982-0370)—March 28: **SEAMUS EGAN.** This former boy wonder—at fourteen, he won the prestigious All-Ireland Championships on four different instruments: flute, tin whistle, mandolin, and banjo—is, at twenty-six, a ripe old master. His soundtrack to the movie "The Brothers McMullen" was an unexpected hit, and his impressive new album, "When Juniper Sleeps," finds him pushing the Celtic-music envelope ever further.

CHICAGO B.L.U.E.S., 73 Eighth Ave., at 13th St. (924-9755)—Dedicated to the music of the Windy City. March 29-30: The Nighthawks.

FEZ, 380 Lafayette St. (533-7000)—A comfortable neo-Moroccan bar hidden inside the Time Café. The downstairs room, where bands



Lou Reed, at the Beacon Theatre.

perform, is a fine spot to take in a show. March 30: an evening featuring the music of Carter ("Fargo") Burwell. The **MINGUS BIG BAND** still packs them in every Thursday. Dining.

Irving Plaza, 17 Irving Pl., at 15th St. (777-6800)—March 29: **THE COMMITMENTS.** The 1991 film of the same name is well past its sell-by date, but this show, a soul revue led by cast members Ken McCluskey and Dick Massey and rounded out by a handful of crack Irish session players, is surprisingly fresh. Though the movie's memorable lead singer is not appearing, you may recognize his stand-in: Dave Finnegan, who played the psychotic drummer-bouncer who liked to break noses with his forehead. April 2: A spinoff from the classic Goth band Bauhaus, **LOVE AND ROCKETS** has been courting the doom-and-gloom generation for years. Much of the trio's latest release, "Sweet F.A.," sounds as dingy and dated as ever, which is not necessarily a bad thing: as long as there are teen-agers decked in black, there will be room for cheery sentiments like "Darkness and emptiness and happiness can all be mine." Show up early for the **DANDY WARHOLS,** a Portland, Oregon, combo that makes psychedelic tinfoil pop (e.g., "Lou Weed") with the debauchery and decadence of the sixties-era Factory. Front man Courtney Taylor, all pout and pursed lips, is a thing to behold. . . . ¶ The Swing Dance Society gathers here every Sunday, with sets from eight until midnight. For information on the society, call 696-9737.

Maxwell's, 1039 Washington St., Hoboken (1-201 798-4064)—March 31: The **SPINANES.** "Strand," the follow-up to this Oregon duo's glorious début, "Manos," makes for a difficult but rewarding listen. The meditative and seductive tracks, with the burnished hues of vocalist Rebecca Gates, create an expansive wash of sound. The Spinanes occasionally exercise too much restraint, but on stage they're polished and captivating.

Mercury Lounge, 217 E. Houston St. (260-4700)—March 28: **THEY MIGHT BE GIANTS.** It's been a decade since John Flansburgh and John Linnell first performed jerky little pop songs while wearing improbably enormous masks. (They later observed that "everybody wants prosthetic foreheads on their real heads.") The Brooklyn-based duo has been unmasked for some time, but its jerky little pop songs—well-crafted and full of surreal humor—flow unabated. March 29-30: **DOG'S EYE VIEW.**

Tramps, 51 W. 21st St. (727-7788)—March 29: **COMBUSTIBLE EDISON.** The first band to feature a signature drink recipe on a CD cover (two ounces brandy, one ounce Campari, one ounce fresh lemon juice; ignite brandy, pour into a shaker full of cracked ice, etc.), this self-proclaimed "suave and sybaritic" group is the most convincing of the new cocktail-lounge sophisticates. The music is a kitschy libation consisting of equal parts vibraphone, Farfisa organ, melodica, bossa-nova bongos, surf guitar (played by a besuited James Bond type called the Millionaire), and torchy vocals courtesy of Miss Lily Banquette. March 30: **POI DOG PONDERING.** With a revolving roster of more than twenty-five members, this Chicago-based band has often felt like an excuse for Frank Orrall, the groups's excitable leader, to give his friends jobs. But, slimmed down to a svelte twelve-piece, Poi Dog has found its focus, both in its celebratory live show and in its deliciously danceable new album (its first since 1992), "Pomegranate."

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

Algonquin Hotel, 59 W. 44th St. (840-6800)—Cabaret legend **JULIE WILSON** is currently at work in the woody nook known as the Oak Room. Dining.

Arthur's Tavern, 57 Grove St. (675-6879)—Mondays belong to the Grove Street Stompers, Tuesdays through Thursdays to Al Bundy and Johnny Parker, Fridays and Saturdays to the Freddy Francis trio, and Sundays to Lee Lorenz and the Creole Cookin' Jazz Band.

Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St., near Sixth Ave. (475-8592)—Through March 31: George Howard. Starting April 2: **HERBIE MANN** and the **GONZALO RUBALCABA** quartet. File Mann alongside Dave Brubeck, Stan Kenton, and the few other lucky players who have enjoyed amazing long-term popularity. His forte seems to be his chameleonlike adaptability—one year he's Latin, the next he's R. & B., the year after that he'll turn up lite rock—but his amiable tooting carpets it all. Pianist Rubalcaba is a virtuoso—and he demonstrates it with cascading phrase after cascading phrase. Dining.

Bradley's, 70 University Pl., at 11th St. (228-6440)—Through March 30: dueling pianos with **HAROLD MABERN** and **GEOFF KEEZER.** Starting April 1: a trio headed by pianist **KENNY BARRON.** Dining.

Carlyle Hotel, Madison Ave. at 74th St. (744-1600)—**BARBARA COOK** is in command of this urbane dinner-and-music room through late April, backed up by her longtime pianist and arranger Wally Harper. Her voice remains almost defiantly that of the nineteen-fifties Broadway ingénue, and her material is as winning as a fresh corsage. . . . ¶ Across the hall, in Bemelmans Bar, pianist **PETER MINTUN** is in attendance.

Fifty Seven Fifty Seven, 57 E. 57th St. (758-5757)—A cool, sumptuous piano-and-bass room in the Four Seasons Hotel, with twenty-two-foot-high ceilings, a long backlit bar stocked with single-malt Scotch, and fine jazz seven nights a week. Dining.

Five Spot, 4 W. 31st St. (631-0100)—March 28-31: **JIMMY SMITH.** The Hammond organ was certainly around before the mid-fifties, when Smith started messing with it, but can anyone remember what it was used for? His influence is so pervasive that his name has become practically synonymous with the instrument. With the hip-hop nation now picking up on his classic blues-driven grooves, Smith is as happening as ever. Dining.

Iridium, 44 W. 63rd St. (582-2121)—Through March 31: the **PAQUITO D'RIVERA** quintet.

Knickerbocker, 33 University Pl., at 9th St. (228-8490)—March 27-30: piano and guitar with **JUDY CARMICHAEL** and **CHRIS FLORY.**

Knitting Factory, 74 Leonard St., between Broadway and Church St. (219-3055)—Through March 31: the **PHAROAH SANDERS** group. With his talent for titanic eruptions now tempered by an equal flair for soulful ballads, Sanders has become the complete saxophonist. It's been quite an evolution. Once a roaring iconoclast—he used to make even late-period Coltrane sound reserved—he now embraces the audience with a colossal tone and naked emotion. A week of Sanders can cure what ails you.

Le Madeleine, 403 W. 43rd St. (246-2993)—Every Sunday evening, guitar great **GENE BERTONCINI** lights up this cozy Hell's Kitchen bistro with his simmering melodicism and chordal grace.

Rainbow & Stars, 30 Rockefeller Plaza (632-5000)—A plush, old-fashioned night club, sixty-five floors above it all, complete with Art Deco fixtures, intimate glitter, and a panoramic view as dizzying as the tab. **LINDA LAVIN** is in through March 30. **VIC DAMONE** takes over on April 2. . . . ¶ Across the hall, in the Rainbow Room, there's a revolving dance floor, plus swinging big-band music courtesy of the Rainbow Room Orchestra, featuring vocalists Sean Mahony and Claudette Sierra. Closed Mondays.

Smalls, 183 W. 10th St. (929-7565)—This aptly named club features up-and-coming players jamming late into the night.

Sweet Basil, 88 Seventh Ave. S., at Bleecker St. (242-1785)—The **ABDULLAH IBRAHIM** trio is in the midst of a two-week run. It's always a treat to hear this pianist: his free-ranging improvisations, Ellingtonian lyricism, and funky Johannesburg vamps capture the common ground between South Africa and the Big Apple.

Tavern on the Green, Central Park W. at 67th St. (873-3200)—Vocalist Sandra Booker sings through March 31.

Village Vanguard, 178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. (255-4037)—Through March 31: the **JOE LOVANO** quartet. His fortieth birthday is history, but despite this unfashionable circumstance there isn't a more satisfying saxophonist on the scene. Lovano knows his history but has no need for the shackles of self-imposed conservatism: in his world, it's possible to love Ornette Coleman as much as you do Stan Getz. He's found a middle ground—he revels in openhearted swing, yet he's willing to bust open tone and harmony when passion dictates. His intensity on up-tempo numbers turns into an equally powerful romantic density on ballads. This time Lovano, now in the second week of his engagement, gets the star treatment. He appears with his soul mate and collaborator, the trumpeter Tom Harrell. Come early and expect a tight fit. The **ROY HAYNES** quartet has the stage starting April 2. The **VANGUARD JAZZ ORCHESTRA** holds sway on Mondays.

Visiones, 125 Macdougal St., at W. 3rd St. (673-5576)—March 27-30: The Joe Chambers group. April 2: The **TED NASH** quintet. This skillful saxophonist is a veteran soloist from the Vanguard Jazz Orchestra and its predecessor, the Mel Lewis Big Band. Dining.

Zinc Bar, 90 W. Houston St. (477-8337)—To judge from his age, the thirty-seven-year-old guitarist **HOWARD ALDEN** (through March 27) should be either churning out fusion or regurgitating Wes Montgomery licks. Instead, he's the master of his own stylistic terrain, a place where swing, early bop, and impressionistic chamber jazz come together. Alden has worked with Red Norvo, Woody Herman, Flip Phillips, and Kenny Davern, but he also plays regularly with other mainstream modernists, like bassist Michael Moore, clarinettist Ken Peplowski, and cornettist Warren Vache. Alden has no use for neo-hard bop: he swings on swingers, caresses ballads, and turns odd chestnuts like Phillips' "The Eel's Nephew" into vital, tensile performances. Using a seven-string guitar like his mentor Bucky Pizzarelli's, Alden finds the buried bass notes and ripe augmented chords that turn a phrase from prose into poetry.

Zinno, 126 W. 13th St. (924-5182)—Through March 30: piano and drums with **JAMES WILLIAMS** and **PETER WASHINGTON.** Starting April 1: the piano-bass-and-sax trio of **JUNIOR MANCE, CALVIN HILL,** and **JOE TEMPERLEY.**

ART

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 82nd St.—"Splendors of Imperial China." The most magnificent exhibition of the season—a superbly mounted selection of more than four hundred objects from the National Palace Museum, in Taipei—amounts to a fairly complete synopsis of Chinese art in all mediums. The objects range from Neolithic jade disks to decadent, Western-influenced paintings from the reign (1736-95) of the Ch'ien-lung emperor, whose personal collection forms the basis of the Palace Museum's holdings. The level of connoisseurship is unsurpassed. A porcelain bowl, vase, and dish from the Sung dynasty, all three in robin's-egg blue, approach perfection. The zestful immediacy of a scroll by the Zen calligrapher Huai-su, done in a style known to scholars as "wild cursive script," may owe something to his habit of getting drunk as he worked. Most impressive of all are the nearly life-size imperial portraits, which are rendered with a razor-sharp clarity. The one of T'ai-tsu, the founder of the Sung dynasty—a mountainous man in a white robe and a little black cap—proclaims majesty and an unwavering belief that China will endure forever. Who would argue? Through May 19. . . . ¶ "Poussin: Works on Paper." A rich trove of drawings, from the collection of Queen Elizabeth II, by the greatest Classicist of the Baroque era. Through March 31. . . . ¶ "Fabergé in America." Fifteen of the forty-four extant imperial Easter eggs are on view in this exhibit of works from American collections, along with more than four hundred baskets, vases, table clocks, cigarette boxes, and other delights. Through April 28. . . . ¶ "Enamels of Limoges," a slew of precious objects dating from the twelfth through the fourteenth centuries—medallions, reliquaries, portable altars, and such—from the French town's abbey workshops. Through June 16. . . . ¶ Lesser-known and experimental color prints by artists employed by the W.P.A. Through May 26. . . . ¶ "Picturing Paradise: Colonial Photography of Samoa, 1875-1925." (Open Tuesdays through Sundays, 9:30 to 5:15, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 8:45.)

Museum of Modern Art, 11 W. 53rd St.—"Brancusi," a tantalizing mini-retrospective of twenty-four sculptures that represent the master at his best: the wood-and-limestone "Exotic Plant," at once primitive and unspeakably sophisticated; two big, comical oak cups; a set of four tilted heads, in bronze, plaster, and wood, so dreamy that you almost drift away; and the sublime gray-marble "Fish." Through April 23. . . . ¶ A large retrospective of black-and-white photographs from the late forties to the present by Roy DeCarava. Among the subjects are jazz musicians, street and subway life, and urban civil-rights protests. Through May 7. . . . ¶ "Deformations: Aspects of the Modern Grotesque" features works in many mediums by such artists as Francis Bacon, Cindy Sherman, James Ensor, Philip Guston, and Eva Hesse. Through May 21. . . . ¶ Drawings, an architectural model, and documentary photographs provide an overview of the German designer Lilly Reich's work, which included several installations for clothing, housing, and building-materials expositions in the twenties and thirties. Through May 7. . . . ¶ "Sol LeWitt Prints, 1970-1995." Through May 7. (Open Saturdays through Tuesdays, 11 to 6; Thursdays and Fridays, noon to 8:30.)

Guggenheim Museum, Fifth Ave. at 89th St.—"Abstraction in the Twentieth Century: Total Risk, Freedom, Discipline." This exhibition is chockablock with masterpieces—from early Kandinskys and Maleviches to the mute totems of minimalism which have dominated abstract art since the sixties—but some of the elisions are galling. Where are Hans Hofmann, Kenneth Noland, Morris Louis? Why so few women? Why *nine* Rymans but not even one Marden? And why no artists who came to the fore after the seventies? In short, a beautiful failure. Through May 12. (Open Sundays through Wednesdays, 10 to 6; Fridays and Saturdays, 10 to 8.)

Whitney Museum of American Art, Madison Ave. at 75th St.—A retrospective of a hundred assemblages, constructed from scavenged street and flea-market materials, by Edward Kienholz (1927-94) and Nancy Reddin Kienholz. Through June 2. . . . ¶ "Willem de Kooning's Door Cycle." A display of four paintings from the mid-sixties on long, narrow doors, supplemented by several related works and by photographs of de Kooning by Hans Namuth. Through May 26. (Open Wednesdays, and Fridays through Sundays, 11 to 6; Thursdays, 1 to 8.)

American Museum of Natural History, Central Park W. at 79th St.—"Amber: Window to the Past." Since the Mesolithic Period (9000-6000 B.C.), human beings have carved amulets out of fossilized tree resin. But all sorts of things—butterflies, tree frogs, geckos—were getting stuck in amber at a considerably earlier date; the oldest known victims (on view here) are entrapped in ninety-four-million-year-old amber from New Jersey. (Open daily, 10 to 5:45, and Friday and Saturday evenings until 8:45.)

Brooklyn Museum, Eastern Parkway—A large number of paintings, sculptures, costumes, and religious objects from the viceroyalties of New Spain and Peru are on view in "Converging Cultures: Art & Identity in Spanish America." . . . ¶ "Alone in a Crowd: Prints by African-American Artists from the 1930s-1940s." Through April 21. (Open Wednesdays through Sundays, 10 to 5.)

Frick Collection, 1 E. 70th St.—"Greuze: A Portraitist for the '90s." Jean-Baptiste Greuze (1725-1805) was widely celebrated for his sentimental, moralizing genre scenes—Diderot lauded his work as an antidote to the frivolity of Boucher—but by the close of the eighteenth century his reputation was already on the wane. This small but choice exhibition, which concentrates on the artist's portraiture, covers only the tumultuous decade that witnessed the Revolution, the Directory, and the beginning of Napoléon's Consulate. Although Greuze remained at heart a Royalist (he powdered his hair throughout the revolutionary period), he took advantage of changes in the political climate to boost his sagging fortunes, picking up the slack created by the exile of his aristocratic sitters with commissions from the potentates of the new regime. The focus of the show is two recently acquired pastels, companion portraits of the famous comic actor Baptiste Aîné (the original Count Almaviva in Beaumarchais's "Le Mariage de Figaro" and "Le Barbier de Séville") and his wife. Through April 14. (Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, 10 to 6; Sundays, 1 to 6.)

Morgan Library, 29 E. 36th St.—"A Great Heritage" comprises a hundred and three of the best sheets in the Duke of Devonshire's collection of works on paper and includes some of the greatest drawings by Leonardo, Raphael, Rembrandt, and Rubens. Through April 21. . . . ¶ "The Art of the Brontës," a fascinating roomful of drawings, manuscripts, and juvenilia by Anne, Charlotte, Emily, and their brother, Branwell, as well as some of their personal effects. Through April 14. (Open Tuesdays through Fridays, 10:30 to 5; Saturdays, 10:30 to 6; Sundays, noon to 6.)

Wallach Art Gallery, Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St.—"Building the Collective: Soviet Graphic Design, 1917-1937." A vivid and comprehensive survey of Soviet posters. Luminaries are here (Rodchenko, Lissitzky, the Stenberg brothers), but so are such lesser-known artists as Viktor Deni, Elena Semenova, and Natal'ia Pinus. Through March 30. (Open Wednesdays through Saturdays, 1 to 5.)

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

(Unless otherwise noted, galleries are open Tuesdays through Saturdays, from around 10 or 11 to between 5 and 6.)

Drew Beattie & Daniel Davidson—A new series of collaborative paintings in which the artists work together on one half of the canvas, then fold it over while wet to create a mirror image. Through March 30. (Helman, 20 W. 57th St.)

Vija Celmins—These paintings and drawings of night skies have a lustrous profundity that might without exaggeration be called cosmic. The intense drawings, which trace the paths of falling stars, are created from dense, lush layers of charcoal, in rich blacks that fade to deep grays, with flecks of starlight pricking through. The paintings are harder-edged and, consequently, less poetic. Through April 5. (McKee, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St.)

Robert Graham—Three new bronze female nudes, along with dozens of prints of the same models. Through April 20. (Gagosian, 980 Madison Ave., at 76th St.)

Jane Kaplowitz—A series of paintings in a Warholian mode, with captions and inventory numbers, based on Visconti's 1971 film, "Death in Venice." Through April 13. (McCoy, 41 E. 57th St. Open Mondays.)

Short List—**JOE ANDOE,** Wächter, 111 E. 65th St. Through April 17. . . . **GEORG BASELITZ,** Werner, 21 E. 67th St. Open Mondays; through April 27. . . . **ROBERT BERLIND,** De Nagy, 41 W. 57th St. Through April 6. . . . **ALAN BERLINER,** Sculpture Center, 167 E. 69th St. Through April 16. . . . **SUE COE,** Galerie St. Etienne, 24 W. 57th St. Through May 24. . . . **ALAN FELTUS,** Forum, 745 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. Through April 13. . . . **GLENN GOLDBERG,** Knoedler, 19 E. 70th St. Through April 10. . . . **EVA HESSE** and **ROBERTO JUAREZ,** Robert Miller, 41 E. 57th St. Through April 6. . . . **BILL JENSEN,** Washburn, 20 W. 57th St. Through April 13. . . . **WOLF KAHN,** DC Moore, 724 Fifth Ave., at 57th St. Through April 20. . . . **JACQUES LIPCHITZ,** Marlborough, 40 W. 57th St. Open Mondays; through April 13. . . . **PORTIA MUNSON,** Yoshii, 20 W. 57th St. Through April 20. . . . **RICHARD SERRA,** Marks, 1018 Madison Ave., at 79th St. Through April 13. . . . **KRZYSZTOF WODICZKO,** Galerie Lelong, 20 W. 57th St. Through April 27.

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

Saul Bass—A retrospective of designs and logos (for AT&T, the Girl Scouts) and title sequences (for "West Side Story," "Spartacus," "The Age of Innocence") by the graphic-design master. Through April 5. (School of Visual Arts, 209 E. 23rd St. Open Mondays through Thursdays, 9 to 8; Fridays and Saturdays, 9 to 5.)

Stephen Prina / Steve Wolfe—Thirty-five photographs, mostly indecipherable nudes, overlaid with computer-generated text fragments and bold planes of psychedelic-poster colors. The images have the sure graphic touch of nineteen-sixties fashion photography, without a trace of the glamour. / In oil, enamel, and modelling paste, this San Francisco-based artist has painstakingly re-created his lifetime collection of paperbacks ("On the Road," "In Cold Blood," Salinger's "Nine Stories") and records (Van Dyke Parks, the Beatles, Van Morrison). If you were in the class of '69, this will all be extremely familiar. Through March 30. (Luhring Augustine, 130 Prince St.)

Gary Simmons—Three huge wall drawings on chalkboard and several smaller, related works on paper. The artist handles the difficulty inherent in working on this scale with impressive élan, continuing to exploit his signature style—smudged or erased chalk—while retreating from the didacticism of his earlier work, most of which drew on racial stereotypes. The imagery (a roller coaster, a gazebo, a cartoonishly rendered explosion) seems utterly familiar, yet somehow imbued with an obscure personal significance. Through April 13. (Metro Pictures, 150 Greene St.)

Kara Walker—"From the Bowels to the Bosom: A Reconstruction," an installation of drawings and wall-mounted silhouettes in which the artist uses the conventional historical cyclorama to reëxamine the repressed history of blacks in the Old South. In the announcement for her exhibition, Walker describes herself as a "Free Negress," and her wickedly funny, defiantly two-dimensional (both spatially and figuratively) images—blacks and whites enduring and indulging in various forms of rape, mutilation, and murder—display a sensibility bracingly free of both right- and left-wing cant. The reconstruction that Walker proposes isn't pretty, but the refinement and delicacy of her execution demonstrate that ugly messages can benefit from beautiful packaging. Through April 13. (Wooster Gardens, 558 Broadway.)

Nari Ward—"Happy Smilers," a complex multimedia installation by a Jamaican-born artist whose work was prominently featured in the 1995 Whitney Biennial. Ward has created an enclosure of various kinds of refuse—old mattresses, air conditioners, refrigerators—bound together with fire hoses. Sand and salt blanket the floor, a fire escape looms overhead, and traditional Jamaican music is piped in. A fantasia of dislocation, the installation conjures a junkyard dreamscape pitched between the memory of a lost island culture and the contemporary reality of Harlem streets. Through April 6. (Deitch Projects, 76 Grand St. Open Wednesdays through Saturdays, noon to 6.)

"Counterculture"—Subtitled "Alternative Information from the Underground Press to the Internet," this historical survey digs up more than a thousand newspapers, zines, digital publications, pamphlets, and other paraphernalia from the mid-sixties on. Through April 20. (Exit Art, 548 Broadway.)

"Landscapes"—Paintings and drawings by Walton Ford, Michael Zwack, Peter Schuyff, and Jack Barth (all of them of the here and now), and by Louis Michel Eilshemius (1864-1941), an eccentric who lived as a recluse on East 57th Street. Through April 6. (Kasmin, 74 Grand St.)

Short List—**GHADA AMER,** Nosei, 530 W. 22nd St. Open Wednesdays through Sundays, 11 to 6; through April 11. . . . **VICTOR BURGIN,** Weber, 142 Greene St. Through April 13. . . . **RONI HORN,** Marks, 522 W. 22nd St. Open Thursdays through Sundays, noon to 6; through April 14. . . . **KCHO,** Gladstone, 99 Greene St. Through April 20. . . . **LARRY MANTELLO,** Wittels, 580 Broadway. Through April 20. . . . **SHARI MENDELSON** and **NANCY DIAMOND,** Black + Herron, 79 Grand St. Through April 6. . . . **BILL RICHARDS,** Ricco/Maresca, 152 Wooster St. Through April 13. . . . **ERIKA ROTHENBERG,** P.P.O.W, 532 Broadway. Through April 20. . . . **JULIÃO SARMENTO,** Sean Kelly, 43 Mercer St. Through April 20. . . . **PETER SCHUYFF,** Shafrazi, 119 Wooster St. Through April 20. . . . **ROBERT THERRIEN** and **CHRYSSA,** Castelli, 420 West Broadway. Through April 13. . . . **MEYER VAISMAN,** 303 Gallery, 89 Greene St. Through April 20.

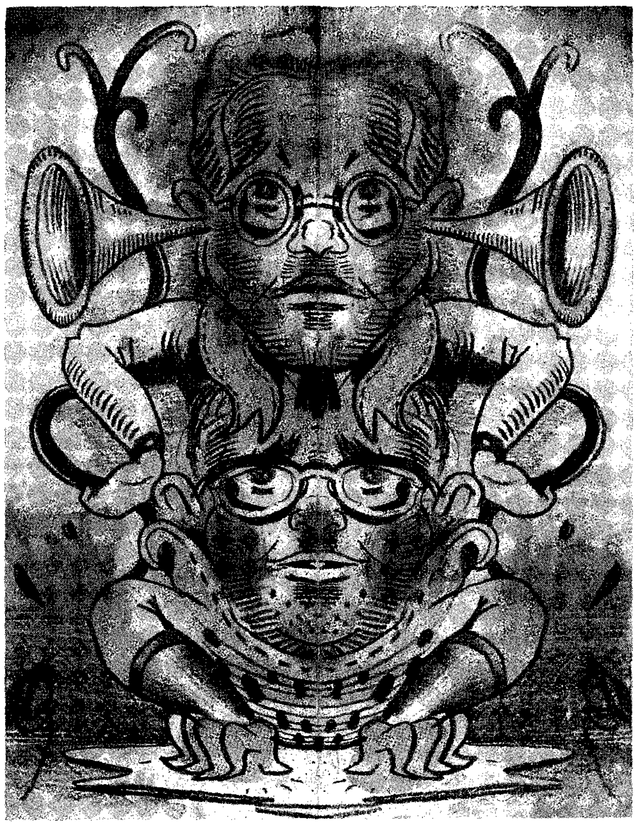
OTHER VENUES

"The Avant-Garde Letterhead"—Italian Futurists, Russian Constructivists, and members of the Bauhaus gave voice to the avant-garde in letters written on letterheads they designed themselves. On view here are numerous examples of writing paper, envelopes, postcards, and other scrivened ephemera by such artists and designers as Tristan Tzara, Kurt Schwitters, Herbert Bayer, and Laszlo Moholy-Nagy. Organized by the Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum. Through May 8. (American Institute of Graphic Arts, 164 Fifth Ave., at 22nd St. Open Mondays through Fridays, noon to 6; Saturdays, noon to 5.)

"Six Bridges: The Making of the New York Megalopolis"—The six in question are the George Washington, the Bayonne, the Triborough, the Bronx-Whitestone, the Throgs Neck, and the Verrazano-Narrows; all of them were designed by the preëminent engineer Othmar H. Ammann (who also designed the Lincoln Tunnel and supervised construction of the Golden Gate Bridge). Architectural drawings, maps, photographs, and film clips trace the history of each undertaking. Organized by the Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum. Through April 19. (PaineWebber Building, Sixth Ave. at 52nd St. Open Mondays through Fridays, 8 to 6.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

International Asian Art Fair—Asian Art Week continues with this new show, in which fifty dealers purvey temptations from Japan to Iran and from Korea to India. (7th Regiment Armory, Park Ave. at 66th St. March 30-April 2. Tickets at the door.)



Self-portrait by Drew Beattie & Daniel Davidson (Helman).

Christie's—Back-to-back auctions of Asian art. March 27 at 10: Chinese paintings and calligraphy. . . . ¶ March 27 at 2: Indian, Himalayan, and Southeast Asian art. . . . ¶ March 28 at 10 and 2: Chinese art works in various mediums, especially ceramics. . . . ¶ March 29 at 4 and March 30 at 10 and 2: Japanese prints, paintings, and other art. (Park Ave. at 59th St. 546-1000.)

Christie's East—March 27 at 10 and 2: Asian and European decorative arts. (219 E. 67th St. 606-0400.)

Sotheby's—March 27 at 10:15: Korean art, including ceramics and paintings. . . . ¶ March 27 at 2: Chinese paintings, from the thirteenth century to the present. . . . ¶ March 28 at 10:15 and 2: Indian and Southeast Asian art, including notable offerings of sculpture. . . . ¶ March 29 at 10:15 and 2: Art from Japan. . . . ¶ March 30 at 10:15: An arcade auction of Asian collectibles carrying modest estimates. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 606-7000.)

Swann's—An auction of printed and manuscript African-Americana: nearly four hundred lots that include slave narratives, correspondence, family registers, and historic editions of works by noted authors. (104 E. 25th St. 254-4710. March 28 at 10:30.)

PHOTOGRAPHY

Harry Callahan—The modern legend's clarity and consistency are well represented in this exhibit of lesser-known photographs and a handful of masterpieces. Three sharp color prints of listing Chicago storefronts (1954) are surprisingly Hopperesque. The famous portraits of the artist's wife and daughter and of his friend Bob Fine could carry a show on their own. What this gathering does best is whet the appetite for the big Callahan retrospective at the National Gallery, in Washington, D.C. (through May 19). Reserve your Amtrak seats now; it's not coming north. Through April 6. (Pace Wildenstein MacGill, 32 E. 57th St.)

Builder Levy—Selections from an extensive black-and-white series featuring Appalachian coal miners, their families, and their desolate coalfield homes. Through March 30. (O.K. Harris, 383 West Broadway.)

Sheila Metzner / Judith Joy Ross—Dramatically lit, richly tinted photographs of great monuments (the Great Pyramids at Giza, the stone heads of Easter Island) that recapture the exciting sense of discovery and the perfumed atmosphere of old *National Geographic* photographs. / Ross offers deliberate archaism of a different sort. Known for her groups of portraits—children at play, veterans, congressmen—this time she takes on the schoolchildren of Hazleton, Pennsylvania (her hometown): little girls in pinafores, kids rehearsing the Christmas pageant, dippy high-school sweethearts. Through April 6. (Danziger, 130 Prince St.)

David Vestal—Quiet, watery day and night views of New York City from the forties through the sixties. Vestal—who is also a teacher, an editor, and a prolific writer—developed a fine intuition for photographing conditions that dramatically change the urban tenor. Picturesque snowfalls, a white-out blizzard, a battering rainstorm—all are captured with unaffected fluency. An atypical image anthropomorphizes a dozen or so Chelsea water towers, which have congregated on the rooftops to admire the hazy sunset. Through April 27. (Mann, 42 E. 76th St.)

International Center of Photography Midtown, Sixth Ave. at 43rd St.—"Intimate Nature: Ansel Adams and the Close View." Closeups that complement the artist's panoramic visions. Through June 2. (Open daily, except Mondays, 11 to 6, and Tuesday evenings until 8.)

Group Shows—At **GRAHAM,** 1014 Madison Ave., at 78th St.: Elegant, high-contrast portraits of clouds by John Schabel; mysterious interiors by Lorna Bieber; delicate platinum-palladium still-lifes by Regina DeLuise; and industrial landscapes printed on lead plates by Carl Goldhagen. Through April 6. . . . **LOWINSKY,** 578 Broadway: Two photo-essays on Japan, one from W. Eugene Smith (1961), one from Horace Bristol (1947); and thirteen photogravures of Native Americans by Edward S. Curtis. Through March 30.

Short List—**JED DEVINE,** Benrubi, 52 E. 76th St. Through April 13. . . . **LEONARD FREED,** Leica, 670 Broadway. Through April 24. . . . **CONNIE IMBODEN** and **VICTOR FRIEDMAN,** Witkin, 415 West Broadway. Through April 13. . . . **RAY K. METZKER** and **THOMAS BARROW,** Laurence Miller, 138 Spring St. Through April 13. . . . **CATHERINE OPIE,** Gorney, 100 Greene St. Through March 30. . . . **RICHARD POUSETTE-DART,** Zabriskie, 41 E. 57th St. Through April 13. . . . **FAZAL SHEIKH,** International Center of Photography, 1130 Fifth Ave., at 94th St. Open daily, except Mondays, 11 to 6, and Tuesday evenings until 8; through March 31. . . . **STEFAN THEMERSON,** Ubu, 16 E. 78th St. Through April 27. . . . **ARTHUR TRESS,** Houk Friedman, 851 Madison Ave., at 70th St. Through May 11.

(See the museum listings for photography exhibitions at the Metropolitan Museum and the Museum of Modern Art.)

CLASSICAL MUSIC

Sound Bites

The pianist Russell Sherman's annual New York appearance (on April 2, at the Miller Theatre) comes two weeks before the publication of his book, "Piano Pieces" (Farrar, Straus and Giroux), a collection of dreamily linked observations about the experience of piano playing as it relates to art, doughnuts, chaos theory, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Lenny Dykstra, and a thousand other unexpected subjects. A peripatetic succession of hundred-and-fifty-word aphorisms, the volume is as appealing as it is peculiar. You can fantasize about consuming it slowly, one morsel at a time; but its startling insights turn you into a glutton, and you find yourself biting into each new section before fully swallowing the last. Mr. Sherman describes his book as "the diary of an old and unregenerate crust," which it may be. But this is a crust leavened with imagination and wisdom. To cite one example: the author observes that "the topic of free will versus predestination should be thoroughly researched (or splendidly intuited) before melody and bass, the surrogates for fantasy and fate, can be properly matched"—which prompts him to conclude that "the logical starting point for the education of a pianist might well be the study of Greek tragedy."

(The box-office number for Carnegie Hall and Weill Recital Hall is 247-7800; for Merkin Concert Hall, 129 W. 67th St., 501-3330; and for the 92nd Street Y, Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 996-1100.)

OPERA

METROPOLITAN OPERA—**ROMÉO ET JULIETTE,** by Gounod, with Ruth Ann Swenson and Richard Leech; conducted by Edoardo Müller. (March 27 and March 30 at 8.) . . . **THE VOYAGE,** by Philip Glass. (March 28 and April 2 at 8.) . . . **LA FORZA DEL DESTINO,** with Deborah Voigt, Victoria Livengood, Sergej Larin, and Vladimir Chernov; James Levine. (March 29 and April 1 at 8.) . . . **SALOME,** with Catherine Malfitano, Hanna Schwarz, Kenneth Riegel, and Bernd Weikl; Donald Runnicles. (March 30 at 2.) . . . **NOTE:** On March 31 at 3, winners of the Met's National Council Auditions will take their turns in the house's spotlight. (Metropolitan Opera House. 362-6000.)

NEW YORK CITY OPERA—**THE MERRY WIDOW.** (March 27 at 8 and March 30 at 1:30.) . . . **LA TRAVIATA.** (March 29 at 8.) . . . **DER ROSENKAVALIER.** (March 30 at 8.) . . . **ATTILA,** by Verdi. (March 31 at 1:30.) . . . **THE DREYFUS AFFAIR,** by Jost Meier, to a libretto by George Whyte. (April 2 at 8.) (New York State Theatre. 870-5570.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

NEW YORK PHILHARMONIC—At Avery Fisher Hall, Kurt Masur conducting. The concluding concerts of a two-week Beethoven festival. March 26 at 7:30 and March 28 at 8: The "Leonore" Overture No. 2 and the Piano Concertos No. 2 and No. 4 (featuring Alfred Brendel). . . . ¶ March 29 at 8: The "Leonore" Overture No. 3 and the Symphonies No. 2 and No. 7. . . . ¶ March 30 and April 1 at 8: The Symphony No. 2, the "Leonore" Overture No. 3, and the Piano Concerto No. 5 (with Mr. Brendel). (875-5030.)

"EIN DEUTSCHES REQUIEM"—Brahms's musical journey from grief to consolation, performed by soprano Deborah Stephens, baritone Sherrill Milnes, and the Choirs and Orchestra of St. Ignatius Loyola, Kent Tritle directing. (Church of St. Ignatius Loyola, Park Ave. at 84th St. 288-2520. March 27 at 8.)

LITTLE ORCHESTRA SOCIETY—Dino Anagnost conducting. March 28 at 7: Excerpts from six Oscar-winning film scores and a few less-decorated ones, with critics Jeffrey Lyons and Michael Medved offering their opinions along the way. The soloists include pianist David Buechner and singer Susannah McCorkle. (Alice Tully Hall. 875-5050.) . . . ¶ March 31 at 5: Dvořák's "Stabat Mater," with the Metropolitan Singers/The Greek Choral Society. (Cathedral of the Holy Trinity, 319 E. 74th St. For information about tickets, call 704-2100.)

BROOKLYN PHILHARMONIC—A weekend given over to the music of Virgil Thomson (plus a dash of Debussy); including orchestral concerts on March 29-30 at 8 and a "talk-and-play" afternoon on March 31 at 2. (Brooklyn Academy of Music, 30 Lafayette Ave. 1-718 636-4100.)

MOZART'S REQUIEM—March 29 at 8: Performed (along with several motets by Victoria) by the Amor Artis chorus and orchestra. (St. Jean Baptiste Church, Lexington Ave. at 76th St. For information about tickets, call 874-4513.) . . . ¶ March 31 at 5: With the Holy Trinity Choir and Orchestra and the Greenwich Village Chamber Singers. (Church of the Holy Trinity, 316 E. 88th St. Tickets at the door on the afternoon of the concert.)

NEW YORK CHAMBER SYMPHONY—Lorin Hollander is the soloist in Saint-Saëns's Piano Concerto No. 5 (the "Egyptian"). Also on the program are Erik Satie's "Messe des Pauvres" (as edited and arranged by David Diamond), Dvořák's "Czech Suite," and the première of a work by Vivian Fung. Gerard Schwarz conducts. (92nd Street Y. March 30 at 8 and April 2 at 7:30.)

CITY ISLAND BAROQUE ENSEMBLE—Harpsichordist Ilan Rechtman is featured in an all-Bach program that includes the "Brandenburg" Concerto No. 5. (Le Refuge Inn, 620 City Island Ave., City Island, the Bronx. 1-718 885-2478. March 31 at noon.)

ST. MATTHEW PASSION—Robert Shaw leads Bach's towering Holy Week masterpiece, with the Orchestra of St. Luke's, the Atlanta Symphony Chamber Chorus, the Saint Thomas Boys Choir, and soloists Sylvia McNair (soprano), Marietta Simpson (mezzo-soprano), Richard Clement (tenor), James Michael McGuire (baritone), William Stone (baritone, as Jesus), and Scot Weir (tenor, as the Evangelist). (Carnegie Hall. April 2 at 7.)

RECITALS

ANDRÁS SCHIFF—The pianist offers music by Schumann: "Arabeske," "Davidsbündlertänze," "Blumenstück," and "Symphonic Études." (Avery Fisher Hall. 875-5030. March 27 at 8.)

"VOICES OF THE SPIRIT"—Soprano Dawn Upshaw's vocal chamber music series concludes with works that describe moments of spiritual epiphany, by Jonathan Harvey, Yehudi Wyner, Bach (his Cantata No. 172), Wolf, and Messiaen. Mezzo-soprano Lorraine Hunt, tenor Richard Croft, bass Kevin Langan, pianist Gilbert Kalish, and a period-instrument ensemble conducted by John Harbison assist her in the performances. (92nd Street Y. March 27 at 8.)

ST. LUKE'S CHAMBER ENSEMBLE—Presenting Brahms's Horn Trio and Piano Quintet (with John Browning), as well as Reger's G-Major Serenade (Op. 141a). (Weill Recital Hall. March 27 at 8.)

LUCY SHELTON—The soprano performs songs by Carter and Stravinsky, with pianist John Constable. (Merkin Concert Hall. March 27 at 8.)

JENÖ JANDÓ—In the days of the LP, pianists Alfred Brendel, Guiomar Novães, and Lili Kraus were among the reigning nobility of the budget bin. Their CD-era counterpart is the Hungarian Jenö Jandó, whose ubiquity on the Naxos label (eighty-three disks and counting) has made him a household name among music lovers with good taste but shallow pockets. There's nothing cheap about his performances, which are always serious and often inspired. True to form, he enters New York's musical life not with a splash but a ripple, at a chamber-scale gathering during which he will play five pieces by Liszt, including the "Sonetto 104 del Petrarca" and the B-Minor Sonata. (Hungarian Consulate, 227 E. 52nd St. March 28

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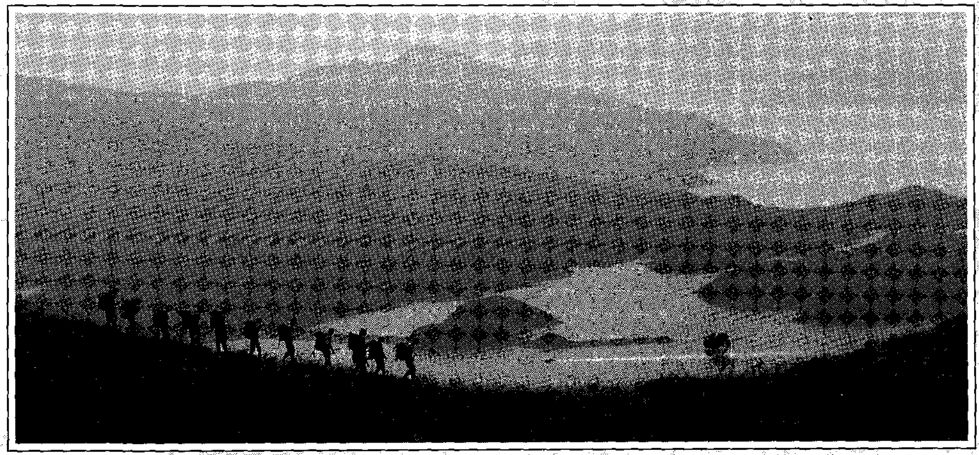
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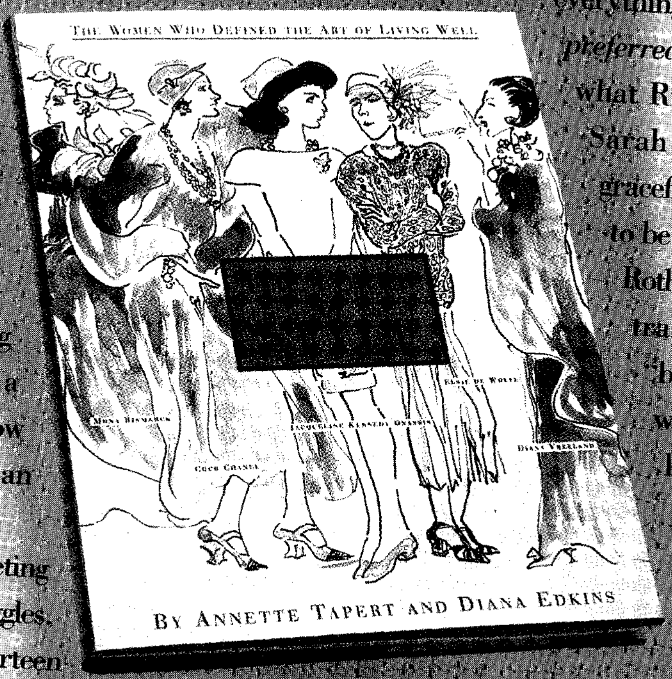
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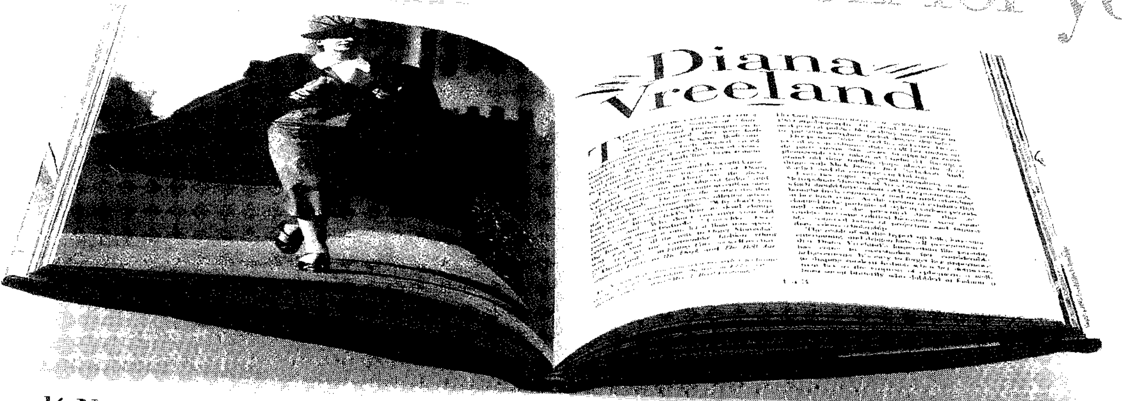
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Bargemusic—Pianist Ruth Laredo, violinist Christiaan Bor, violist Toby Hoffman, and French hornist David Jolley perform works by Schumann and Brahms. (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. 1-718 624-4061. March 28 at 7:30 and March 31 at 4.)

New York Philomusica Chamber Ensemble—Playing trios by Beethoven and Dvořák, as well as Harbison's "Book of Hours and Seasons." (Merkin Concert Hall. March 28 at 8.)

Beaux Arts Trio—Performing piano trios by Hummel, Ravel, and Brahms (in C Major). (Metropolitan Museum, Fifth Ave. at 83rd St. 570-3949. March 29-30 at 8.)

"The Other Side of the Window"—This multidisciplinary event embraces three groups of seven: a seven-movement song cycle by Frank J. Oteri (scored for soprano, flutes, toy piano, guitar, and cello) based on seven poems by Margaret Atwood, performed in a space hung with seven similarly inspired paintings (by *Melissa Richard). (La Mama's La Galleria,* 6 E. 1st St. March 29 at 8 and March 31 at 7:30. Admission by contribution.)

Historical Performance Weekend—A symposium hosted by the Mannes College of Music will include two concerts of note in the conservatory's concert hall (150 W. 85th St.). March 30 at 8: The Mannes Camerata offers music from sixteenth-century Spain. (No tickets necessary.) . . . ¶ March 31 at 8: Seventeenth-century Italian music, performed by soprano Jill Feldman, keyboard player Albert Fuller, and others. (For information about tickets, call 874-6438.)

Garrick Ohlsson—The pianist concludes his historic six-concert survey of *le tout Chopin* with a program that includes the B-Minor Sonata, the Third Ballade, and the twelve Opus 25 Études. (Alice Tully Hall. 875-5050. March 31 at 2.)

Strings Attached—Back-to-back concerts in an art gallery. March 31 at 2: Violinist Nina Beilina and a bevy of string-playing colleagues offer music by Bach, Ravel, and Mendelssohn (his Octet). . . . ¶ March 31 at 6: The violinist Ellen Orner, especially noted for her interpretations of twentieth-century music, plays works by Bartók, Benjamin Lees, and Toshio Hosokawa which reflect the surrealist aesthetic of André Breton. (Landon Gallery, 1926 Broadway, at 64th St., third floor. Tickets at the door.)

Festetics String Quartet—Since 1985, the members of this Budapest-based foursome have been combining the musicological biases of the period-instrument movement with the full-blooded tradition of Hungarian quartet playing. Their approach has none of the prissiness that sometimes afflicts historically informed readings of the Classical repertoire. Until now, Americans have had to be content with their powerful Haydn and Mozart recordings, mostly on the Arcana label (and all terrific, except for Mozart piano quartets rendered deadly by the leaden interpretations of fortepianist Paul Badura-Skoda). In its first New York recital, the ensemble offers quartets by Haydn (in G Minor, Op. 74, No. 3) and Mozart (in C Major, K. 465, the "Dissonance"); fortepianist Maria Rose assists in a Haydn piano trio and in Mozart's G-Minor Piano Quartet. (Frick Collection, 1 E. 70th St. 288-0700. March 31 at 5.)

Russell Sherman—The Boston-based pianist offers Robert Helps's "Shall We Dance?," Beethoven's E-Minor Sonata (Op. 90), Brahms's "Paganini" Variations and E-Major Intermezzo, and Liszt's "Transcendental" Étude No. 9 and "Après une Lecture du Dante." (Miller Theatre, Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. 854-7799. April 2 at 8.)

ALSO OF INTEREST

SARA LAIMON—Folk-inflected piano works by Bartók, Bright Sheng, Frederic Rzewski, and Ives. (Weill Recital Hall. March 28 at 8.) . . . **TAIPEI PHILHARMONIC CHORUS:** In a-cappella works, including examples of aboriginal Taiwanese music. (Taipei Theatre, 1221 Sixth Ave., at 48th St. 373-1850. March 29-30 at 7:30 and March 31 at 2.) . . . **ANGELES STRING QUARTET:** Performing music by Haydn, Harbison, Webern, and Schumann. (Weill Recital Hall. March 29 at 8.) . . . **JUILLIARD PERCUSSION ENSEMBLE:** Works by Boulez, Varèse, and others. (Alice Tully Hall. March 29 at 8. For information about free tickets, which are required, call 769-7406.) . . . **MANHATTAN SCHOOL OF MUSIC PHILHARMONIA:** David Gilbert conducts works by Piston and David Noon, as well as his own music. (Miller Theatre, Columbia University, Broadway at 116th St. March 31 at 3. No tickets necessary.) . . . **SCOTT YOO:** Violinist, performing Vivaldi's "The Four Seasons," as well as sonatas by Dan Coleman and Mozart; presented by Young Concert Artists. (92nd Street Y. March 31 at 3.) . . . **"STRAY DOGS":** Songs from (or inspired by) the eponymous Russian café, where the poet Anna Akhmatova and her circle congregated early this century. (Greenwich House Music School, 46 Barrow St. 242-4770. March 31 at 5.) . . . **SALON SOIRÉES:** Chamber works by Debussy, Chopin, and Ilan Rechtman. (Hotel Wales, Madison Ave. at 92nd St. March 31 at 6 and 8. No tickets necessary.) . . . **JUPITER SYMPHONY:** Roy Eaton is the soloist in two piano concertos by John Field. (Good Shepherd *Presbyterian Church, 152 W. 66th St.* April 1 at 2 and 7 and April 2 at 8. For information, call 799-1259.) . . . **HANDEL'S "TAMERLANO":** In a semi-staged production by the Manhattan School of Music. (Merkin Concert Hall. April 1 at 7:30. . . . ¶ Borden Auditorium, Manhattan School of Music, Broadway at 122nd St. 749-2802, ext. 428. April 2 at 7:30.) . . . **BRENTANO STRING QUARTET:** Playing Berg's "Lyric Suite" and Mozart's Clarinet Quintet (with David Shifrin). (Rose Rehearsal Studio, Rose Building, Lincoln Center. April 2 at 6:45. For information about tickets, call 875-5788.) . . . **PARNASSUS:** The contemporary-music group plays works by Andrew Imbrie, Schoenberg, and others. (Ethical Culture Society, 2 W. 64th St. April 2 at 8. Tickets at the door.) . . . **EMORY CHAMBER MUSIC SOCIETY OF ATLANTA:** Playing twentieth-century works, by Dohnányi and John Anthony Lennon, among others. (Merkin Concert Hall. April 2 at 8.)

Short-short-story specialist Barry Yourgrau, at Fez.

DAVID TOMB

ABOVE AND BEYOND

Looney Tomes—Barry Yourgrau looks like a beatnik version of Salvador Dali, and he writes like one, too. His specialty is the short short story, and he can fit seven or eight of them into a reading: a man dates a cannibal, a landlord complains about elephant guests, a marriage broker falls in love with his first client. Tuesday at Fez, Yourgrau reads-performs-recites some of what he calls his "potpourri of sad, strange, and—there's no other word for it—lascivious stories." (Time Café, 380 Lafayette St. 533-2680. April 2 at 9.)

Vampires and Mummies—March 27 at 6:30: Art historian Arthur Corwin retells the seasonal myths (about worms, werewolves, vampires) that helped prehistoric people keep track of appointments in the Ice Age. (Cooper Union's Hewitt Building, Third Ave. at 7th St. For more information, call 353-4195.) . . . ¶ March 27 at 8:15: Archeologist Kent Weeks dishes the dirt on the fifty sons of Ramesses II, whose tombs he discovered last year in the Valley of the Kings at Luxor. (Congregation Rodeph Shalom, 7 W. 83rd St. For information about tickets, call 996-1100.)

Bring In 'Da Film—Walter Taylor and Michael Chertok screen rare tap-dance clips from vaudeville and night-club gigs by the likes of Peg Leg Bates, Bunny Briggs, Bubba Gaines, Bill (Bojangles) Robinson, and Tip, Tap, and Toe. (Church of St. Paul and St. Andrew, 263 W. 86th St., at West End Ave. March 31 at 7:15. For reservations, call 252-2236.)

Harlem Renaissance Man—The Academy of American Poets and the Poets' Corner of the Cathedral of St. John the Divine quietly kick off the cruellest month (and the first national poetry month) with a tribute to Langston Hughes. Michael S. Harper, Marilyn Nelson, and Arnold Rampersad, among others, read poetry and prose from the bard of 127th Street. (Amsterdam Ave. at 112th St. April 2 at 8. No tickets necessary.)

Readings—March 27 at 6:30: Jane Smiley hosts a reading from "The Best American Short Stories 1995": Malachy McCourt reads "The Drowning," by Edward J. Delaney, and Maria Tucci reads "Pagan Night," by Kate Braverman. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 864-5400.) . . . ¶ March 27 at 7: Jennifer Egan ("Emerald City") reads from her work. (Limbo, 47 Avenue A, at 4th St. No tickets necessary.) . . . ¶ March 29 at 7: Heather Lewis, Daphne Merkin, Martha Southgate, and Elizabeth Wurtzel, among others, read fiction and essays about the tensions, sexual and political, between lesbians and straight women. (West Side YMCA, 5 W. 63rd St. Tickets at the door.) . . . ¶ March 31 at 4: Poets Justine Cook and John Peck read from their work. (Educational Alliance, 197 East Broadway, at Jefferson St. Tickets at the door.) . . . ¶ April 2 at 7: Writers Daphne Beal, Karmen Lizzul, and Tanuja Desai read a story each. (KGB, 85 E. 4th St. No tickets necessary.)

Talks—March 29 at 3: Novelists Elizabeth Cullinan ("A Change of Scene") and Ellen Currie ("Available Light") and poets Billy Collins ("The Art of Drowning") and Eamon Grennan ("As If It Matters") consider the peculiarities of New York Irish culture. (City University Graduate Center Auditorium, 33 W. 42nd St. No tickets necessary.) . . . ¶ March 29 at 7: In a discussion of his memoir, "Ambivalent Zen," *Tricycle* consulting editor Lawrence Shainberg recalls his Zen apprenticeship. (Sufi Books, 227 West Broadway. No tickets necessary.) . . . ¶ March 30 at 2: Bamboo craftsman Hafu Matsumoto, protégé of Living National Treasure Shokansai Iizuka, demonstrates contemporary applications of traditional bamboo-weaving techniques. Bamboo flutist Gen Morita performs during the workshop. (Japan Society, 333 E. 47th St. 752-3015.)

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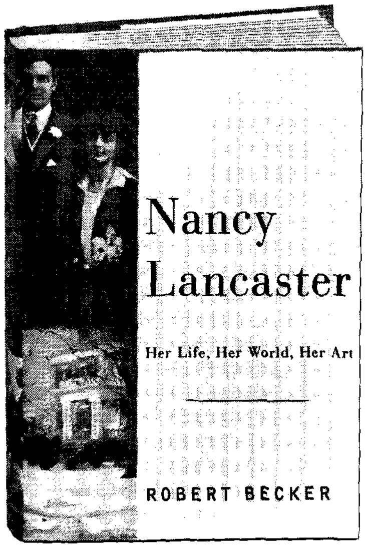

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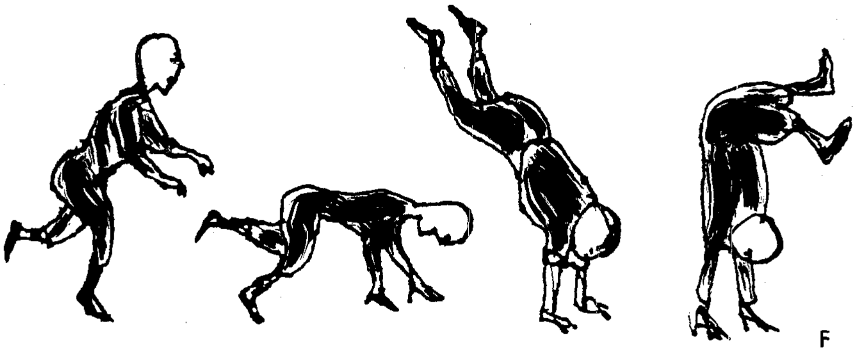


THE MOVIES

FILMS OPENING THIS WEEK

All Dogs Go to Heaven 2—A sequel to the 1989 animated feature, directed by Paul Sabella and Larry Leker. With voices by Charlie Sheen, Sheena Easton, and Dom DeLuise. Opening March 29. (Village East Cinemas, Murray Hill Cinemas, Manhattan Twin, 23rd St. West Triplex, and Lincoln Square.)

Carried Away—Dennis Hopper stars as a Midwestern schoolteacher whose life is disrupted by an affair with a student (Amy Locane), in a drama directed by Bruno Barreto. With Amy Irving. Written by Ed Jones and Dale Herd, from Jim Harrison's 1976 novel, "Farmer." Opening March 29. (Village East Cinemas, Eastside Playhouse, and Lincoln Square.)

Denise Calls Up—A comedy written and directed by Hal Salwen, about young urban professionals who spend their lives on the telephone. Opening March 29. (Quad Cinema and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

A Family Thing—Richard Pearce's drama about half brothers, starring Robert Duvall and James Earl Jones. (Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema.) Opening March 29. (19th Street East 6, First & 62nd Cinemas, Orpheum VII, Art Greenwich Twin, Regency, and Criterion Center.)

Ghost in the Shell—An animated thriller by Mamoru Oshii, about international terrorism in the twenty-first century. Opening March 29. (Cinema Village.)

Sgt. Bilko—Steve Martin plays the noncom that Phil Silvers made famous on television in the fifties, in Jonathan Lynn's updated comedy about army life. With Dan Aykroyd, Phil Hartman, and Glenne Headly. Written by Andy Breckman. Opening March 29. (34th Street Showplace, First & 62nd Cinemas, Orpheum VII, Waverly, Chelsea Cinemas, 84th Street Sixplex, and National Twin.)

Sweet Nothing—Gary Winick's drama about drugs in the Bronx. (Reviewed below in Current Films.) Opening March 27.

CURRENT FILMS

(The signed notes are by Bruce Diones, Sarah Kerr, Anthony Lane, Terrence Rafferty, and James Wolcott. If a movie has been reviewed in The Current Cinema, the date of its review is given. Theatre information is listed on page 31.)

Anne Frank Remembered—Jon Blair's documentary includes interviews with Holocaust survivors and footage of Otto Frank, Anne's father, who died in 1980. Kenneth Branagh narrates. (Quad Cinema and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

Antonia's Line—A Dutch feminist fairy tale about an eccentric single mother (the impressive Willeke van Ammelrooy) who sets up housekeeping on a farm after the Second World War and takes all kinds of strays—from a retarded rape victim to a depressive, Schopenhauer-saturated intellectual—under her wing. The movie could be a crowd pleaser at art houses, but what it's packaging is little more than self-regard: Antonia and her clan are righteous, and anyone who gets in their way is a pig. Written and directed by Marleen Gorris. In Dutch.—S.K. (Angelika Film Center.)

The Birdcage—Mike Nichols's remake of "La Cage aux Folles" (1978) largely contents itself with decking out what appears to be a profoundly, unalterably French farce in American drag—changing the locale from Saint-Tropez to Miami and then hoping that the story, in its cheerful new costume, will *still* play. It does. But the cautious, sensible approach taken by Nichols and his screenwriter, Elaine May, has the drawback of making this movie feel a little, as the French might say, de trop. Although Robin Williams and Nathan Lane, as the bickering middle-aged lovers originally played by Ugo Tognazzi and Michel Serrault, are skillful, the script doesn't give them much opportunity to distinguish themselves from their memorable predecessors. Oddly, the funniest performer here is Gene Hackman, playing an aggressively straight, family-values-spouting politician. Hackman's deadpan inanity is sublimely comic; he turns a rambling, inarticulate monologue on the beauties of the American landscape into an aria of dullness. Also with Dianne Wiest, Hank Azaria, Dan Futterman, and Christine Baranski.—T.R. (3/18/96) (Village Theatre VII, 34th St. East, Baronet, Coronet, Orpheum VII, Chelsea Cinemas, Lincoln Square, Metro Cinema, and Criterion Center.)

Broken Arrow—John Travolta plays a disgruntled Air Force pilot who hijacks a couple of nuclear warheads. This is not, however, a standard-issue doomsday thriller, but a spectacularly nutty and entertaining chase picture; the director, John Woo—who is best known for his delirious Hong Kong gangster movies—tosses off risky stunts and eye-popping effects like one-liners. The hero and the heroine, played by Christian Slater and Samantha Mathis, are likable, but the character to watch is Travolta, who brings a refreshingly all-American exuberance to action-movie villainy. Screenplay by Graham Yost (who also wrote "Speed").—T.R. (2/19/96) (Park & 86th Street Cinemas, and 23rd St. West Triplex. . . . ¶ Regency and Criterion Center; through March 28.)

The Celluloid Closet—Directors Rob Epstein and Jeffrey Friedman have turned the late Vito Russo's 1981 study of gay and lesbian characters in the movies into a fabulous look at queer culture and the way it has been perceived through the decades. It's no longer a secret that many of the films in question were written, directed, or acted in by gay men and women, and that irony gives the picture a greater depth than you find in most Hollywood compilations. Epstein and Friedman don't share Russo's rage: this is a forgiving look back, more thoughtful than angry in its assessment of the industry's limitations.—B.D. (Village Theatre VII and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

Chungking Express—This Hong Kong import, directed by Wong Kar-Wai, consists of two loosely connected stories about lovesick policemen captivated by mysterious women. But it's no romping, stomping John Woo-Jackie Chan blood-squib festival—it's a romantic comedy tickled silly by its own dopey cuteness. It dotes on its lonely-guy heroes as they dote on themselves. The film is so talky, repetitious, visually stuttery, and slackly paced that sitting through it once is like seeing it twice. For cultists only. In Cantonese and Mandarin.—J.W. (Angelika Film Center and Carnegie Hall Cinemas.)

Dead Man Walking—Tim Robbins's blunt, powerful movie tells the story of a murderer (Sean

Penn) awaiting execution and a nun (Susan Sarandon) trying to save his soul—and, if possible, his skin. The filmmaker clearly hopes that familiarity with the grisly realities of capital punishment will finally breed contempt for the idea of premeditated, state-sponsored killing. And although the picture sometimes turns clunky and flat, as if it were sagging under the weight of its good intentions, it winds up being devastatingly effective. Penn has to reveal, within a reckless and apparently despicable character, a salvageable soul, and he makes the erratic rhythm of the condemned man's spiritual progress seem effortless and natural: he captures the languid, insinuating tempo of grace invading a locked-up spirit.—T.R. (1/8/96) (Village Theatre VII, First & 62nd Cinemas, and Lincoln Square.)

Diabolique—Sharon Stone, Isabelle Adjani, and Chazz Palminteri in a thriller directed by Jeremiah Chechik. (Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema.) (Village Theatre VII, Murray Hill Cinemas, 72nd Street East, Orpheum VII, Chelsea Cinemas, Ziegfeld, Lincoln Square, and Olympia)

Ed—Matt LeBlanc stars in a comedy directed by Bill Couturié, about a minor-league baseball team whose third baseman is a chimpanzee. With Jayne Brook, Bill Cobbs, and Jack Warden. Written by David Mickey Evans. (34th Street Showplace, Park & 86th Street Cinemas, Olympia, and National Twin.)

Executive Decision—Kurt Russell and Steven Seagal team up to save the nation's capital from a hijacked jet full of nerve gas, in a thriller directed by Stuart Baird. With Halle Berry and John Leguizamo. Written by Jim and John Thomas. (Village East Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, 34th Street Showplace, Gemini, Orpheum VII, 84th Street Sixplex, and Criterion Center.)

Fargo—Joel and Ethan Coen's coldest movie if not their coolest: it opens with a whiteout that slowly resolves itself into a desolate Minnesota snowscape. Everybody talks with painful slowness, as if the icy air were freezing their chops; the resulting mood is lugubrious and oddly winning. The story, about a hopeless businessman (William H. Macy) who hires a couple of crooks (Peter Stormare and Steve Buscemi) to kidnap his wife, offers the usual Coen compound of random daftness and concentrated violence. Frances McDormand has a high old time as the police chief of the town of Brainerd; she enters the plot late and, decent and unhurried (her character is seven months pregnant), plods steadily toward a solution. A few scenes go around in circles, as if snow-blind, and the humor may be too inward and contorted for some tastes. But McDormand brings order to the weirdness and warms it up.—A.L. (3/25/96) (19th Street East 6, New York Twin, Art Greenwich Twin, and Lincoln Square.)

Flirting with Disaster—An adopted scientist (Ben Stiller) hunts down his birth parents in a comedy written and directed by David O. Russell. With Patricia Arquette. (Cinema I, Chelsea Cinemas, and Lincoln Square.)

The Flower of My Secret—Pedro Almodóvar's new picture feels rather sad and low-key—which is no bad thing, since his high-key work (notably "Tie Me Up! Tie Me Down!" and "Kika") was becoming painful to watch. Leo (Marisa Paredes) is struggling through a wretched marriage and a split in her professional career: she longs to be taken seriously as a novelist but has been churning out schlock romances for years, with horrible success, under a pseudonym. The plot—straightforward, by Almodóvar's standards—involves Leo's efforts to strip the dead wood from her life and discover what's left alive, a process that includes flirting with a literary editor (the Chaucerian Juan Echanove) and making peace with her family. (Chus Lampreave and Rossy De Palma form a great pair as, respectively, Leo's mother and sister.) Almodóvar's script is, as usual, ripe to bursting, and even his sturdiest fans may be weary of flamenco sequences by now. But the movie itself is gracious, affecting, and frenzy-free. In Spanish.—A.L. (3/25/96) (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

French Twist—A sunlit French farce written and directed by Josiane Balasko, who also enjoys herself no end in the role of Marijo, a chunky, cheerful lesbian who wanders into the marriage of Loli (Victoria Abril) and Laurent (Alain Chabat) and churns it into a froth. Abril's trademark laugh pretty well sums up the picture's gusto, but the fun doesn't last: the story settles down, the characters call an uneasy truce, and Balasko even starts to moralize on the folly of love gone wrong. In French.—A.L. (1/15/96) (Quad Cinema.)

Frisk—Todd Verow's film about sex, violence, and murder in California. With Craig Chester, Michael Gunther, James Lyons, and Parker Posey. Based on Dennis Cooper's 1991 novel; written by James Dwyer, George LaVoo, and the director. (Quad Cinema.)

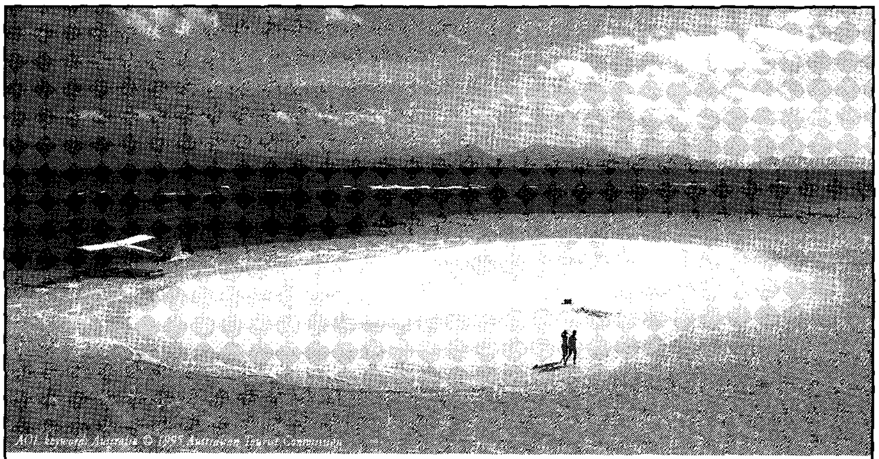
Girl 6—Interesting, frustrating. In Spike Lee's latest, Theresa Randle plays an aspiring actress who takes up phone sex to pay the bills and ends up liking it. Lee must have been drawn to the playwright Suzan-Lori Parks's screenplay because it purports to explore images of African-American femininity; in fantasy sequences, Randle dresses up as the iconic actresses Dorothy Dandridge and Foxy Brown. But the movie lacks a clear point of view. While the mood shifts from morality play to straight-out porn to abstract pastiche reminiscent of the French New Wave, the heroine remains a cipher, and you're never sure whether to admire her, pity her, or condemn her. Lee appears as a neighbor (and as Mr. Jefferson, in a brief sendup of the TV series), and there are walk-ons by Debi Mazar, Naomi Campbell, and Madonna.—S.K. (19th Street East 6, Murray Hill Cinemas, First & 62nd Cinemas, Orpheum VII, Waverly, 84th Street Sixplex, and Criterion Center.)

It's My Party—A drama written and directed by Randal Kleiser about an AIDS-afflicted architect (Eric Roberts) who throws a two-day farewell party. With Gregory Harrison, Marlee Matlin, and Lee Grant. (Angelika Film Center and Lincoln Square.)

Jack & Sarah—A romantic comedy, written and directed by Tim Sullivan, in which a single father (Richard E. Grant) has to choose between the young woman (Samantha Mathis) he hired to care for his infant daughter and a partner at his law firm (Cherie Lunghi). With Judi Dench and Ian McKellen. (Beekman and 62nd & Broadway.)

Land and Freedom—One of the few English-language movies to tackle the Spanish Civil War since "For Whom the Bell Tolls." It tolls this time for David, a young Liverpudlian who travels to Spain in 1936 to join the Republican cause. For the director, Ken Loach, the Fascists barely exist: what matters to him is the comradeship, the daily comedy, and the flurries of panic which unite the volunteers. Ian Hart provides a fine, fiery turn as David, toughening up a dangerously virtuous role; the plot drags him back and forth between the ragged international militia at the front and the more organized Popular Army that gradually takes charge. Overall, the film is a muddle: the earnest political confrontations and the dire romance of David and a fellow-fighter (Rosana Pastor) have only a fraction of the dramatic force that Loach delivers with his battle scenes. But those scenes are tremendous—scruffy, fractious, and rousing. When the rifles jam or backfire, you can hear a whole heroic movement beginning to tear itself apart.—A.L. (3/25/96) (Lincoln Plaza Cinemas.)

Little Indian, Big City—Loathsome French piffle, dubbed into English, about a yuppie trader (Thierry Lhermitte) who travels to the Amazon to ask his estranged wife for a divorce, only to learn that he has a thirteen-year-old son, Mimi-Siku (Ludwig Briand), who has been raised as an Indian. Humor: back in Paris, Mimi-Siku pees wherever he feels like it, slurps cat food, knees a cop in the groin, and makes out with a girl against his father's



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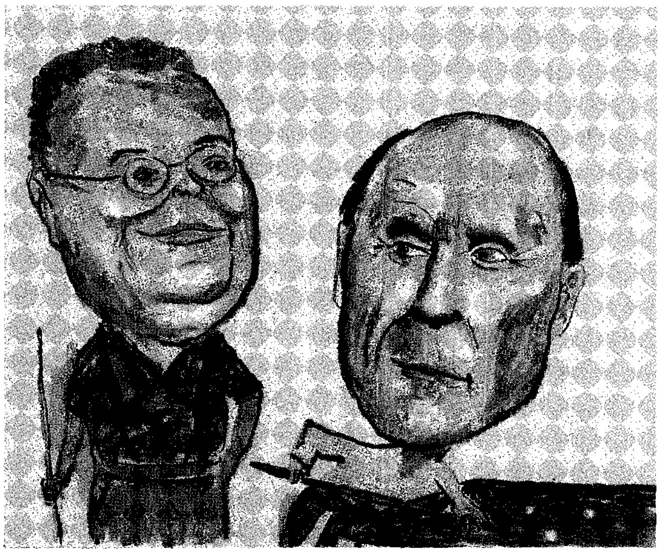


Opening March 29, James Earl Jones and Robert Duvall in "A Family Thing."

AHMET GÖRGÜN

wishes, using the crass excuse "She asked me to do it—with her *eyes.*" Moral: Mimi-Siku, through his ignorance of the concept of decorum, shows his father the falsity of his yuppie life style. Directed by Hervé Palud.—S.K. (Village East Cinemas, Sutton, 86th Street East Twin, 23rd St. West Triplex, Lincoln Square, and Embassy 3.)

Man of the Year—An engaging mock documentary by Dirk Shafer, a gay hunk who passed for straight as *Playgirl's* 1992 Man of the Year. As the American woman's ideal man, he was booked constantly on TV talk shows—there are funny clips from "The Phil Donahue Show," the "Joan Rivers Show," and several others. The rest of the movie re-creates episodes from the big year (a nude shoot, a date with the winner of a *Playgirl* contest), keeping condescension at bay with some nice comic spins. The movie falters toward the end, when Shafer portrays a friend's death from AIDS, rather self-servingly, as the wake-up call that convinced him to out himself. But on the whole this lighthearted critique of the closet succeeds by treating absurd situations with a knowing smile.—B.D. (Village East Cinemas and Cinema 3rd Avenue.)

Race the Sun—Halle Berry and James Belushi star as high-school teachers in Charles T. Kanganis's drama about a group of nonachievers who build a solar-powered car for a science project. Written by Barry Morrow. (Village East Cinemas, 19th Street East 6, First & 62nd Cinemas, Orpheum VII, 84th Street Sixplex, and Embassy 1.)

Rumble in the Bronx—If Jackie Chan's new American film, about stolen diamonds and the mob, lacks the inspired lunacy of his Hong Kong classics, it's still fine as a ninety-minute Jackie Chan primer; breaking an ankle during filming (he wears a cast painted as a sneaker) probably put a crimp in his artistry. While almost all of the actors are bad, Chan has the beautiful, eager confidence of a movie star who loves his work. Directed by Stanley Tong.—B.D. (Village Theatre VII, 34th Street Showplace, 84th Street Sixplex, and Criterion Center.)

Sense and Sensibility—The director, Ang Lee, and the screenwriter, Emma Thompson, turn Jane Austen's first published novel into a gracious and unfailingly pleasant entertainment. Thompson also plays the very sensible heroine, Elinor Dashwood, and carries the movie without overwhelming her fellow-actors. (Alan Rickman and Kate Winslet are especially good; the only clinker is a grotesquely mannered performance by Hugh Grant as Elinor's suitor.) If the picture pressed its temperate charms on us any harder, they would be much easier to resist.—T.R. (12/18/95) (34th Street Showplace, First & 62nd Cinemas, Quad Cinema, and Lincoln Square.)

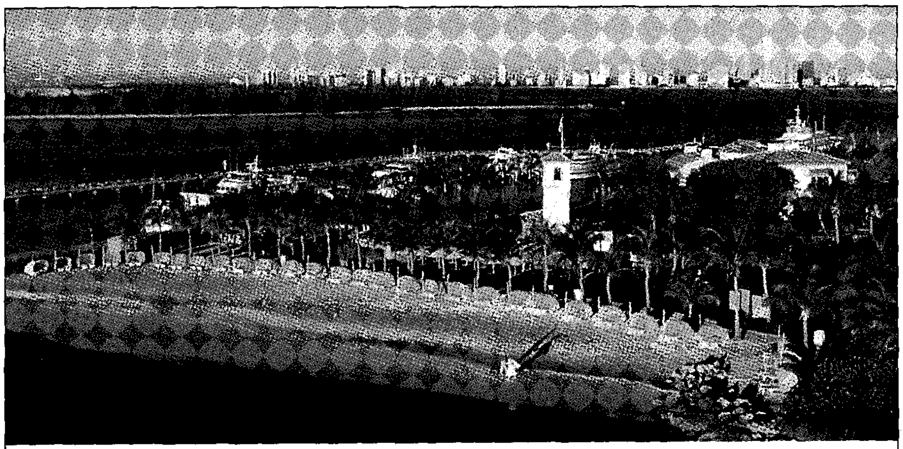
Sweet Nothing—Michael Imperioli plays a young Bronx office worker who starts selling crack in order to help support the wife and kids, only to wind up a lowdown, lying user. This intelligent study is based on a real addict's diary—a genesis that, while good for documentary details, sometimes makes the film feel more like an earnest transcription than an artistic endeavor. Still, it's tightly, lovingly done, and Imperioli and Mira Sorvino (as his wife) strike just the right balance of fragility and obliviousness. Directed by Gary Winick, from a script by Lee Drysdale.—S.K. (Film Forum; starting March 27.)

Two Much—The Spaniard Fernando Trueba ("Belle Époque") co-wrote and directed this would-be comedy, about a smooth Miami art dealer (Antonio Banderas) who is engaged to a ditzy heiress (Melanie Griffith) but invents a fake twin to woo her serious sister (Daryl Hannah). Trueba misses the key to screwball—the absolute perfection of the match—by making Banderas's character a conniving louse and Hannah's a pedantic snob. As for poor Griffith, she plays a thirty-two-year-old but looks as bloated and woozy as an ancient torch singer. Joan Cusack, as Banderas's contemptuous secretary, becomes a stand-in for the audience. Her take on his behavior—"a thousand ways to humiliate"—could be the movie's motto. With Danny Aiello.—S.K. (Village East Cinemas, Gotham Cinema, 86th Street East Twin, and 84th Street Sixplex. . . . ¶ Embassy 4; through March 28.)

Up Close & Personal—It's blonde on blond as Michelle Pfeiffer and Robert Redford, playing a rookie TV reporter and a veteran newshound, dazzle each other (but not us) in a buttery romance directed by Jon Avnet. As she rises in the news biz, he dips, which makes things touchy in the love department—or would, if this movie took the trouble to invade their privacy. A neutered replay of "A Star Is Born," written by Joan Didion and John Gregory Dunne (who did the 1976 Barbra Streisand-Kris Kristofferson version), "Up Close & Personal" has no glamorous crackups or self-destructive lurches, though it does throw in a prison riot. Its lovers simply decouple and drift apart in zero gravity.—J.W. (3/11/96) (Village East Cinemas, Cinema II, Orpheum VII, 23rd St. West Triplex, and Lincoln Square. . . . ¶ Guild; through March 28. . . . ¶ Embassy 4; starting March 29.)

ALSO PLAYING

ACROSS THE SEA OF TIME: Lincoln Square. . . . **THE AMERICAN PRESIDENT** (reviewed in our issue of 11/20/95): Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **ANGELS & INSECTS** (1/29/96): Lincoln Plaza Cinemas. . . . **BABE** (9/4/95): Manhattan Twin. . . . **BEAUTIFUL GIRLS:** Angelika Film Center and Sutton. . . . **BRAVEHEART** (6/5/95): Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **CASINO** (12/4/95): National Twin. . . . **CITY HALL** (2/19/96): 59th Street East Cinema. . . . **GET SHORTY** (10/23/95): Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **HATE (LA HAINE):** Angelika 57. . . . **HELLRAISER: BLOODLINE:** Astor Plaza. . . . **HOMEWARD BOUND II: LOST IN SAN**



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FRANCISCO: Village East Cinemas, Sutton, 86th Street East Twin, 84th Street Sixplex. . . . **IF LUCY FELL:** Gemini. . . . **LAMERICA:** Film Forum. . . . **LAST SUMMER IN THE HAMPTONS:** Angelika 57. . . . **LEAVING LAS VEGAS** (11/6/95): Village East Cinemas, First & 62nd Cinemas, and Lincoln Square. . . . **MIGHTY APHRODITE** (10/30/95): 68th St. Playhouse, Quad Cinema, and Lincoln Plaza Cinemas. . . . **MR. HOLLAND'S OPUS** (1/29/96): Cinema 3rd Avenue and Gemini. . . . **NIXON:** Embassy 2. . . . **OLIVER & COMPANY:** Guild. . . . **ONCE UPON A TIME . . . WHEN WE WERE COLORED:** Olympia. . . . **PERSUASION** (9/25/95): Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **THE POSTMAN:** Village East Cinemas, Murray Hill Cinemas, Eastside Playhouse, East 85th Street, Chelsea Cinemas, and Carnegie Hall Cinemas. . . . **RICHARD III** (1/22/96): Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **SEVEN:** Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **THE STAR MAKER:** Paris. . . **12 MONKEYS** (1/22/96): Manhattan Twin. . . . **WAITING TO EXHALE** (1/15/96): Worldwide Cinemas. . . . **THE YOUNG POISONER'S HANDBOOK:** Angelika Film Center and Cinema 3.

THEATRE ADDRESSES

(For show times, call 777-FILM, except where noted.)

EAST SIDE

ANGELIKA FILM CENTER, 18 W. Houston St.
VILLAGE THEATRE VII, Third Ave. at 11th St.
CINEMA VILLAGE, 22 E. 12th St.
VILLAGE EAST CINEMAS, Second Ave. at 12th St.
19TH STREET EAST 6, Broadway at 19th St.
MURRAY HILL CINEMAS, 160 E. 34th St.
34TH STREET SHOWPLACE, 238 E. 34th St.
34TH ST. EAST, 241 E. 34th St.
EASTSIDE PLAYHOUSE, Third Ave. at 55th St.
SUTTON I AND 2, Third Ave. at 57th St.
GOTHAM CINEMA, Third Ave. at 58th St.
MANHATTAN TWIN, Third Ave. at 59th St.
59TH STREET EAST CINEMA, 239 E. 59th St.
BARONET AND CORONET, Third Ave. at 59th St.
CINEMA I, CINEMA II, AND CINEMA 3RD AVENUE, Third Ave. at 60th St.
FIRST & 62ND CINEMAS, 400 E. 62nd St.
GEMINI I AND 2, Second Ave. at 64th St.
BEEKMAN, Second Ave. at 66th St.
NEW YORK TWIN, Second Ave. at 67th St.
68TH ST. PLAYHOUSE, Third Ave. at 68th St.
72ND STREET EAST, Third Ave. at 71st St.
EAST 85TH STREET, First Ave. at 85th St.
PARK & 86TH STREET CINEMAS, 125 E. 86th St.
ORPHEUM VII, Third Ave. at 86th St.
86TH STREET EAST TWIN, Third Ave. at 86th St.

WEST SIDE

FILM FORUM, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110).
WAVERLY I AND 2, Sixth Ave. at 3rd St.
ART GREENWICH TWIN, Greenwich Ave. at 12th St.
QUAD CINEMA, 34 W. 13th St.
CHELSEA CINEMAS, 260 W. 23rd St.
23RD ST. WEST TRIPLEX, 333 W. 23rd St.
GUILD, 33 W. 50th St.
WORLDWIDE CINEMAS, 50th St. between Eighth and Ninth Aves.
ZIEGFELD, 141 W. 54th St.
CARNEGIE HALL CINEMAS, Seventh Ave. between 56th and 57th Sts.
ANGELIKA 57, 225 W. 57th St.
PARIS, 4 W. 58th St.
CINEMA 3, 2 W. 59th St.
62ND & BROADWAY, 62 W. 62nd St.
LINCOLN PLAZA CINEMAS, Broadway at 63rd St. (757-2280).
REGENCY, Broadway at 67th St.
LINCOLN SQUARE, Broadway at 68th St.
84TH STREET SIXPLEX, Broadway at 84th St.
METRO CINEMA I AND 2, Broadway at 99th St.
OLYMPIA I AND II, Broadway at 107th St.

TIMES SQUARE AREA

ASTOR PLAZA, 44th St. at Broadway.
CRITERION CENTER, Broadway at 44th St.
EMBASSY I, Broadway at 46th St.
EMBASSY 2, 3, AND 4, Seventh Ave. at 47th St.
NATIONAL TWIN, Broadway at 44th St.

REVIVALS

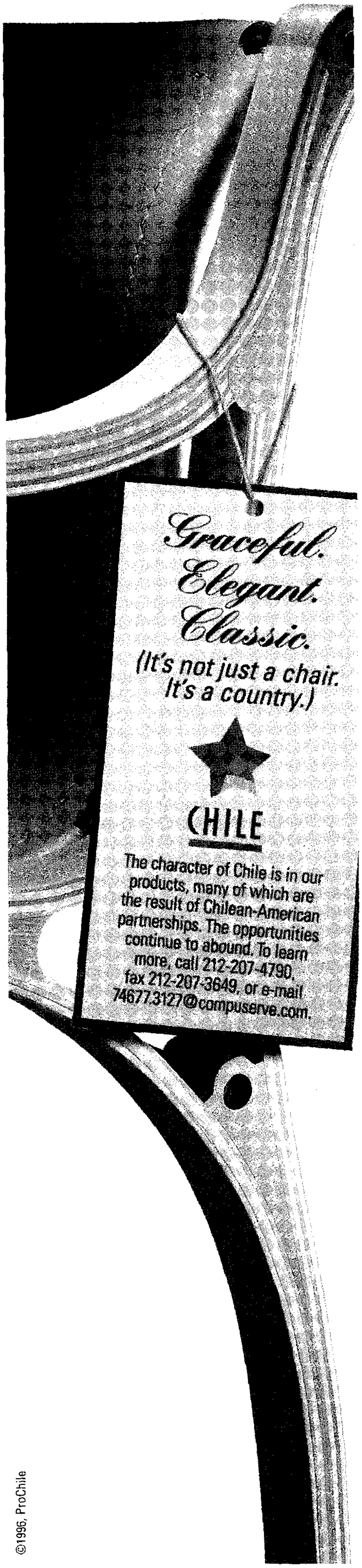
(The following notes are by Pauline Kael and Michael Sragow. Theatre addresses and phone numbers appear with the listings following these notes.)

ANNIE HALL (1977)—Woody Allen's beloved, barbed romance (co-written with Marshall Brickman) was praised for its originality and contemporaneity, but in large part it's a hilarious, sex-reversed version of "The Way We Were," with Allen in the Streisand role, as the anxious Jew who's too smart for happiness, and Diane Keaton in the Redford role, as the fun-loving and intellectually insecure Gentile. It has a great first half—Allen is peerless at conveying the cracked mating calls of a couple of neurotics. When he and the radiant Keaton drift apart, the movie flounders, too.—M.S. (Symphony Space; April 2.)

A FINE MADNESS (1966)—Sean Connery brings ravenous energy to the role of a New York poet who's engaged in the daily battle to express himself. He falls into the hands of a group of psychiatrists who are appalled by his nonconformist impulses. He cuckolds one of them (Patrick O'Neal), who decides to have him lobotomized (i.e., castrated). Directed by Irvin Kershner, from a script by Elliott Baker, based on his novel, the movie suggests a farcical cross between Joyce Cary's "The Horse's Mouth" and Shaw's "The Doctor's Dilemma." There's a well-substantiated Hollywood story that Jack Warner suddenly got the point of the picture, discovered that it was "anti-social," and ordered it recut. What's left is uneven and it has unresolved areas, but it also has a sixties charge to it. Connery walks across a bridge in a way that tells you the world is his. (Women, though, may be puzzled about why the poet's socking his wife—Joanne Woodward—is meant to be hilarious.) The film has a great look (it was shot by Ted McCord) and an amazing cast: Jean Seberg, Colleen Dewhurst, Zohra Lampert, Sorrell Booke, Jackie Coogan, Clive Revill, Harry Bellaver, Kay Medford, Gerald S. O'Loughlin, Bibi Osterwald, Mabel Albertson, and Sue Ane Langdon. The music is by John Addison.—P.K. (Film Forum 2; through March 28.)

LILITH (1964)—Jean Seberg is the demonic, corrupt Lilith, a patient in an elegant Maryland asylum who wants to "leave the mark of her desire on every living creature in the world"; Warren Beatty is the trainee therapist who finds her madness seductive. This high-toned, humorless attempt to create a mystic enigma was the last work of Robert Rossen, who adapted the J. P. Salamanca novel and directed; it's an unusual sort of disaster—full of symbols, chitchat about schizophrenic spiders, and exquisite cinematography (by Eugen Schüfftan), and utterly lacking in energy and depth. Beatty gives his most irritating performance: he broods over each bit of dialogue for an eternity, his heavy eyelids flickering. With Peter Fonda, Kim Hunter, Gene Hackman, Jessica Walter, Anne Meacham, and René Auberjonois; the score is by Kenyon Hopkins.—P.K. (Film Forum 2; through March 28.)

THE MYSTERY OF KASPAR HAUSER (1975)—The story of Kaspar Hauser, who appeared in a German town in the eighteen-twenties, is a factually based variant of the lost-or-abandoned-child, Mowgli-Tarzan myth; Kaspar wasn't raised among wolves, bears, or apes but, rather, in isolation. In this nightmare version, written and directed by Werner Herzog, Kaspar (Bruno S.) is a grunting lump of a man, chained in a dungeonlike cellar from infancy. Covered with sores and welts, unable to stand, he is fed by a black-caped man who beats him with a truncheon. One day, the man carries him to a town square and leaves him there. The townspeople train him in human habits and try to educate him, but as he begins to learn, he balks at what he is taught, and becomes obstinate, trying to retain his new, mesmerized pleasure in nature. Before the issues are resolved, he is struck down by the caped figure, who returns, first to maim him, then to murder him. The film is a double fable, intermingling the stultifying effects of bourgeois society and the cruelty of a demonic



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universe. Herzog achieves a visionary, overcast style; his images look off-balance, crooked, as if the cameraman were wincing. Herzog is a film poet, all right, but he's a didactic film poet, given to heavy, folk-art ironies; he says that society puts you through pain in order to deform you, and he makes it impossible for you to identify with anyone but Kaspar, who hasn't lost his innocent responses. The other people are alone, immobilized, unanimated; life is dormant in them. Though one could not fault this in a painter's vision, in a filmmaker's it is numbing. In Herzog's conception Kaspar is the only one who has still got his soul. This conception has a flower-child fashionableness, but Bruno S. (who was once believed to be a mental defective himself) is amazing. His Kaspar has sly, piggy eyes, yet he's so totally absorbed in experiencing nature, his head thrust out ecstatically, straining to grasp everything he was denied in his cave existence, that he becomes Promethean; the light dawning in that face makes him look like a peasant Beethoven. In German—P.K. (Film Forum 2; starting March 29.)

WILD STRAWBERRIES (1957)—Ingmar Bergman's first big popular success in the United States. It's a very uneven film: an eminent physician (Victor Sjöström) looks back over his life, which is tricked up with gothic effects and contrasts and with peculiarly unconvincing flashbacks and overexplicit dialogue. It's a very lumpy odyssey, yet who can forget Sjöström's face, or the vicious, bickering couple who rasp at each other in the back seat of a car, or the large-scale mask of the beautiful Ingrid Thulin as the physician's unhappy daughter-in-law? Few movies give us such memorable, emotion-charged images. One can try to forget the irritations: the incredibly callow representative of youth, the "cold" rigid son (Gunnar Björnstrand), the disappointingly vacuous parts assigned Bibi Andersson as the two Saras, the expendable role of Naima Wifstrand as the ancient mother. In Swedish.—P.K. (Symphony Space; April 2.)

LATE RUNS, CLASSICS, ETC.

(Titles with a dagger are reviewed above.)

FILM FORUM 2, W. Houston St. west of Sixth Ave. (727-8110)—Through March 28: "Lilith" (†) and "A Fine Madness" (†). . . . From March 29: "The Mystery of Kaspar Hauser" (†).

NEW DIRECTORS/NEW FILMS—A festival of international films. March 27 at 6: "Maborosi" (Hirokazu Kore-eda; Japan). . . . March 27 at 9 and March 28 at 6: "Denise Calls Up" (Hal Salwen; United States). . . . March 28 at 9: "Paradise Lost: The Child Murders at Robin Hood Hills" (Joe Berlinger and Bruce Sinofsky; United States). . . . March 29 at 6 and March 30 at 1: "Walking and Talking" (Nicole Holofcener; United States). . . . March 29 at 9 and March 30 at 3:30: "Justino" (Luis Guridi and Santiago Aguilar; Spain). . . . March 30 at 6:30 and March 31 at 1: "Spark" (Garret Williams; United States) and "Never" (Reza Parsa; Denmark, in Swedish). . . . March 30 at 9 and March 31 at 3:30: "Big Night" (Stanley Tucci and Campbell Scott; United States). . . . March 31 at 6 and April 1 at 6: "When Mother Comes Home for Christmas" (Nilita Vachani; Greece and Germany). . . . April 1 at 9: "Guiltrip" (Gerard Stembridge; Ireland). . . . April 2 at 6: "Madagascar" (Fernando Perez; Cuba) and "Here and There" (Sandra Kogut; Brazil and France). . . . April 2 at 9: "To Have (Or Not)" (Laetitia Masson; French). (Museum of Modern Art, Roy and Niuta Titus Theatres, 11 W. 53rd St. For information, call 875-5610.)

WALTER READE THEATRE, Lincoln Center, 165 W. 65th St., plaza level (875-5600)—A program of recent French films; all in French, with English subtitles. March 27 at 2 and March 28 at 4 and 8:30: "The Smile" (Claude Miller). . . . March 27 at 4 and 9:15: "Muriel Upsets Her Parents" (Philippe Faucon). . . . March 28 at 2 and 6:15: "The Favorite Son" (Nicole Garcia). . . . ¶ March 27 at 6: "Woman in the Dunes" (1964, Hiroshi Teshigahara; in Japanese). . . . ¶ Films by Olivier Assayas; all in French, with English subtitles. March 29 at 2 and 8:30 and March 30 at 4:15: "Disorder" (1986). . . . March 29 at 4 and 10:15 and March 30 at 8:30: "Winter's Child" (1989). . . . March 29 at 6, March 30 at 6 and 10:15, and March 31 at 8:45: "Cold Water" (1994). . . . March 31 at 4:15, April 1 at 2, and April 2 at 4:15: "Paris at Dawn" (1991). . . . March 31 at 6, April 1 at 4, and April 2 at 2: "A New Life" (1993). . . . ¶ Weekend showings for children. March 30-31 at 2: "Six Pack" (1982, Daniel Petrie).

A DIFFERENT LIGHT BOOKSTORE, 151 W. 19th St. (989-4850)—A Sunday-night series of free films. On March 31 at 7, the feature will be "Where the Boys Are" (1960, Henry Levin).

SYMPHONY SPACE, Broadway at 95th St. (864-5400)—April 2 at 7: "Annie Hall" (†). . . . April 2 at 9: "Wild Strawberries" (†).

FLORENCE GOULD HALL, 55 E. 59th St. (355-6160)—April 2 at 12:30, 3:15, 6, and 8:45: "Colonel Chabert" (1994, Yves Angelo; in French), with Gérard Depardieu and Fanny Ardant.

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE, 35th Ave. at 36th St., Astoria (1-718 784-0077)—Films starring Marlon Brando. March 30 at 2: "Bedtime Story" (1964, Ralph Levy). . . . March 30 at 4: "Last Tango in Paris" (1972, Bernardo Bertolucci; in French and English). . . . March 31 at 2: "The Godfather" (1972, Francis Ford Coppola).

WHITNEY MUSEUM, Madison Ave. at 75th St. (570-0537)—Through April 7: Films by Gregory J. Markopoulos (1928-92).

BROOKLYN MUSEUM, Eastern Parkway. (1-718 638-5000)—A program of films from Latin America. March 29 at 7 and March 30 at 2: "The Other Francisco" (1975, Sergio Giral; a Cuban film, in Spanish). . . . March 31 at 2: "Jerico" (1990, Luis Alberto Lamata; a Venezuelan film, in Spanish).

MUSEUM OF TELEVISION AND RADIO, 25 W. 52nd St. (621-6800)—Television work by John Frankenheimer. Through March 31: "Pale Horse, Pale Rider" (1956) and "The Turn of the Screw" (1959). . . . From April 2: "The Last Summer" (1958) and "Winter Dreams" (1957).

KAREN CALDICOTT

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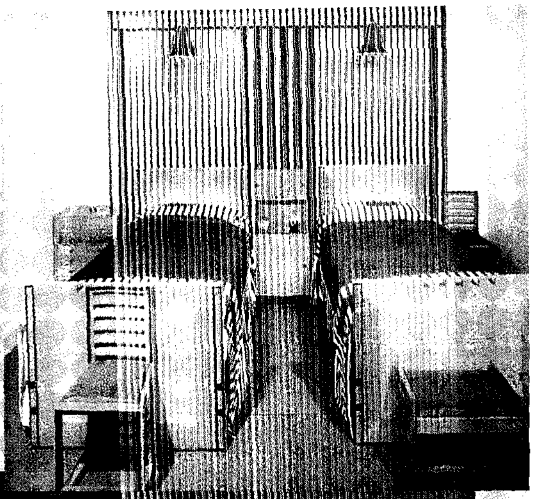
In Britain The Accent Is On Style

Trends follow a circular path. In the '60s, London was a veritable cauldron of style—a cutting-edge city spawning earth-shaking new ideas in fashion, music, art and design. Now the '60s have reemerged as a powerful influence in design and culture, and Britain, though it exhibits a considerably different sensibility than it did thirty years ago, is hotter than ever.

The country has suddenly found itself at the forefront of all things stylish including fashion and architecture, food and music. From Visual Arts UK, a nine-month celebration in northern England's wind-raked heaths, and the Edinburgh Festival and Fringe, to the numerous London eateries that embrace the restaurant-as-theatre concept, there is an unmistakable renaissance of Anglo style. According to travel guide publisher Fodor's, Britain's dining scene is attracting considerable attention in part because of the innovative design of the restaurants themselves. But this celebration of style isn't limited to just the latest trends in British design and culture. Classics are also being rediscovered, revisited, and sometimes they turn up in some rather unexpected places.

So whether you're anxious for a glimpse of the future or one of the past, you're overdue for a visit to Britain, the land with a style all its own.



Charles Rennie Mackintosh in the Hunterian Museum and Art Gallery.

Scotland

Imagine the brooding splendor of storm-tossed clouds looming over smooth, rolling hills, when through a break in the sky, a shaft of sunlight lands on a castle centuries old. For that shining moment, the past is alive and the glory of nature and the power of man exist in the same illuminated space. This is fabled Scotland at her scenic best. But it represents only one of her many faces.

Scotland is more than the sum of her splendid lakes, rolling meadows and mist-shrouded rocky coastline. Visitors will discover a vibrant cultural scene here, and 1996 is the perfect year to explore it.

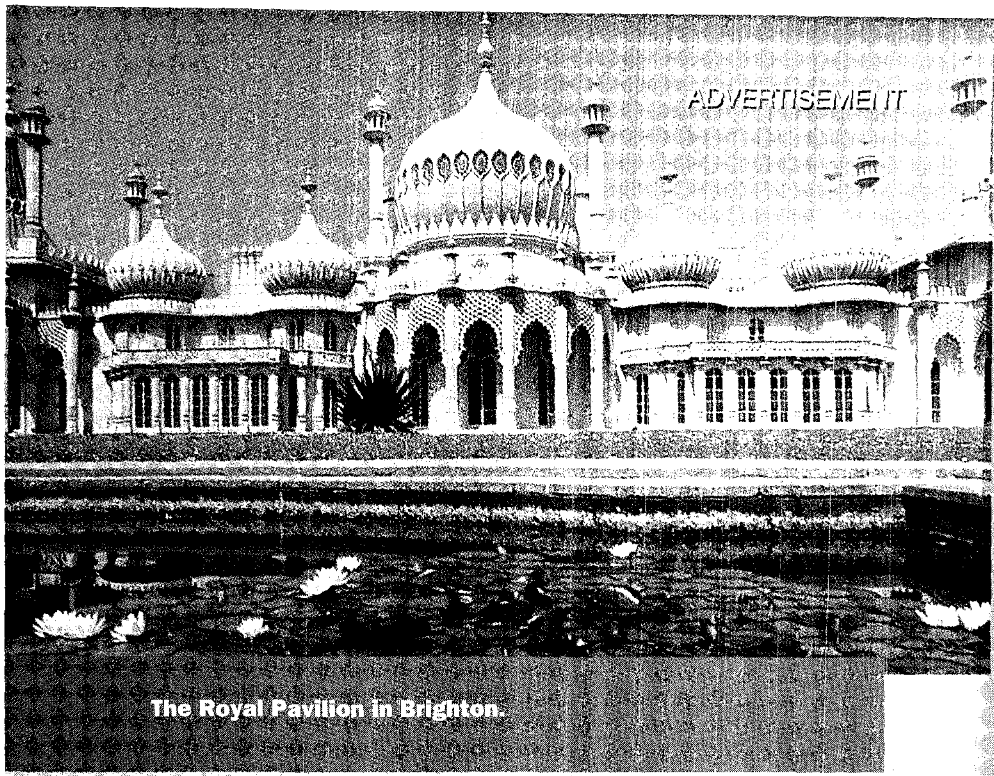
Though the influence of Scottish architect and designer Charles Rennie Mackintosh extends far beyond his native shores, he is a source of considerable pride in his homeland and will be the subject of a major exhibition as part of this year's Glasgow Festival of Visual Arts. The festival, which focuses on all forms of visual arts including fine art, sculpture, photography, film, video, architecture and design, will span the year with innovative and exciting events including public art projects and exhibitions.

Incorporated in this year's festival will be an International Festival of Design celebrating the city's history of innovation and its importance as a design center. The series of exhibitions and lectures that are at the center of the festival will address the subject of design in such diverse areas as sports, fashion, transportation and the environment, with top designers from around the world invited to take part. Adding to the wealth of options for those with an insatiable lust for the visual, Glasgow will also unveil its new Gallery of Modern Art in the early spring.

But Glasgow isn't the only Scottish city nearly bursting with diversions. One need only look toward Edinburgh for a different take on Scottish style, especially during the month of August when the city plays host to the now legendary Edinburgh Festival and Fringe, this year celebrating its 50th anniversary. A veritable carnival of performance art, this crazy, consuming spectacle is unlike anything else in the world as some 9,000 performers from more than 36 countries descend on Edinburgh while a steady stream of planes, trains and cars floods the city with spectators. It's nothing short of a 23-day party, and though no one can possibly take it all in, more than a few hardy souls exhaust themselves trying to catch every performance—including the dreadful ones. After all, seeing the misses is sometimes as much fun as catching the hits.

For more about the attractions of Scotland, send for the Scottish Tourist Board's 88-page Vacation Planner. Call 1-800-258-2023.

Glasgow City Chambers.



The Royal Pavilion in Brighton.

The South of England

England in microcosm, this is the land that embodies her rich heritage. Home to the sleek modernity of London as well as the ancient and enigmatic Stonehenge, a more diverse region would be difficult to find. The literary, cultural and political past of England inscribed across the South has left a profusion of monuments to man's ingenuity and nature's unparalleled beauty.

The palace (or castle) and the garden are perhaps the two quintessential English icons and peerless examples of both, as well as other striking architecture displaying a range of styles, can be found region-wide. South of London, en route to the culturally-endowed town of Brighton, is Leeds Castle, and below that, Penshurst Place. The latter is one of England's great medieval manors while the former, set dramatically in a lake, is a fine historic Royal palace that dates back to the 12th century. In Brighton proper lies the Royal Pavilion, the home of the Prince Regent who would go on to become King George IV. This stunning confection, a sprawling Oriental-style palace, is sure to surprise anyone familiar with only the most typical renditions of 18th-century British architecture. To the west is Winchester, with its fine cathedral soaring above historic streets and the Great Hall containing King Arthur's legendary Round Table.

Heading north, one encounters Blenheim Palace, the birthplace of Sir Winston Churchill and a magnificent Baroque palace set amid 2,100 acres of parkland laid out by "Capability" Brown, Britain's most renowned landscaper. Further west emerges yet another stylistic variation in the architecture of England—the town of Bath. Founded by the Romans, refashioned by the Georgians in the 18th century, and made famous by Jane Austen, Bath remains at once bucolic and decidedly cosmopolitan with an array of antiques stores, bookstores and fashion boutiques. Numerous galleries and museums also line the streets and culture of all sorts thrives here.

Far to the west is the mystic peninsula of Cornwall, an ancient Celtic kingdom shaped by the sea. There's a strong maritime influence here, along with some of England's finest gardens, magnificent historic houses and the lovely cathedral city of Truro.

For more information on the South of England, see the *R.S.V.P.* feature in this issue.

Central England

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Central England's historic houses offer a rare glimpse of treasures rarely seen outside a museum, in rooms often still used by the home's owners. The Queen's country retreat of Sandringham, set in 600 acres of Norfolk countryside, is one of the many grand homes open to visitors. Despite the formidable collections of art, ceramics and silver, its charm lies in the fact that it is essentially a family home. So too is Chatsworth House in Derbyshire, run by the Duke and Duchess of Devonshire. Like other grand homes in the region such as Althorp House, Woburn Abbey and Belvoir Castle, it has been in the owner's family for generations.

Imposing castles and evocative border ruins are a reminder that Central England was frequently a battlefield. The history of ancient battles unfolds at the ruins of Nottingham Castle and the Armoury in Worcester. But most impressive of all is the imposing 500-year-old fortress of Warwick Castle, the finest medieval castle in England where the past comes to life within its mighty walls.

Explore the history-filled streets of graceful cities like Lichfield, Norwich, and Lincoln, and the 700-year-old university city of Cambridge where you can admire the magnificent architecture while punting along the Cam. In the area known as The Potteries, where Wedgwood perfected the art of fine china making, watch craftsmen at

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To discover the riches of Central England, come explore for yourself. For details on receiving a free brochure, see the *R.S.V.P.* feature in this issue.

England's North Country

One might initially conclude that England's North Country was the domain of nature, and there's considerable evidence to support such conjecture. Home to five national parks, each with a dramatically different character, the region has been an inspiration to writers through the ages from Wordsworth and Beatrix Potter to the sisters Brontë. Countless other British literary lights called England's North Country home as well, or simply visited at regular intervals to enjoy an infusion of creativity from the surroundings. Their estates and others, often set amid breathtaking scenery or magnificent gardens, abound in England's North Country and welcome visitors.

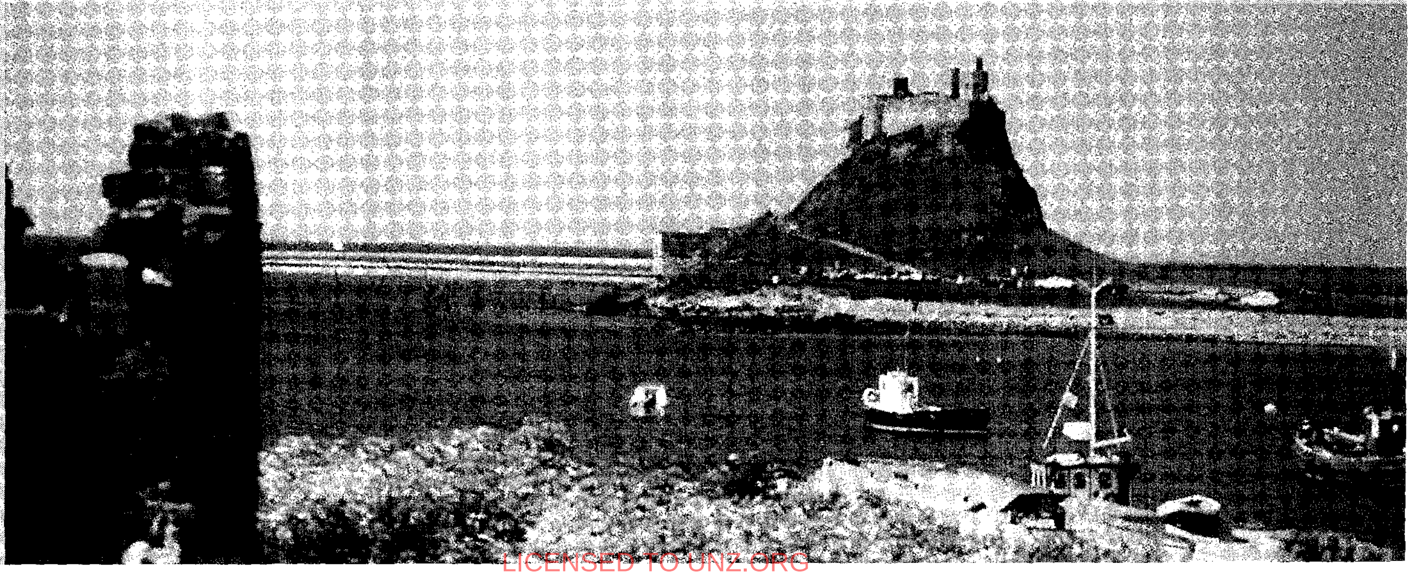
The region is principally important for its historical significance. After all, the history here reaches back more than 2,000 years to when Hadrian's Wall marked the frontier of Rome's empire. And slightly less ancient history is beautifully inscribed in the cathedral cities of York, Chester, Durham and Carlisle. A short ride from the mainland, the magical Isle of Man, steeped in Viking history, is a world of its own.

Finally, the cities of the north, Manchester and Liverpool or Newcastle and Leeds, suggest that the true hallmarks of the region are style and sophistication, as evinced by brilliant nightlife, excellent shopping, superb music and theatre, and world-class restaurants. Indeed England's North Country is a thriving arts center. Arts events are scheduled year-round, from local village festivals to best-selling West End shows. And this year, with Visual Arts 1996, the visual side of England's North Country takes on an added dimension. During a year-long celebration of the visual arts, this ambitious program will feature numerous special exhibitions including a video installation in historic Durham Cathedral by American video artist Bill Viola—an unexpected marriage of contemporary American art with one of the world's finest examples of Norman architecture. Like England's North Country itself, the entire celebration promises countless surprises.

Perhaps most importantly, England's North Country is as easily accessible as it is richly diverting. With five major airlines routed into Manchester, the region's gateway, getting there couldn't be simpler.

For more information on traveling to England's North Country, see the *R.S.V.P.* feature in this issue.

Above: Master potter at work in the Wedgwood Visitor Centre.
Below: Lindisfarne Castle, Holy Island.



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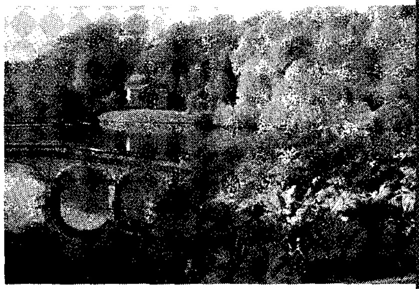
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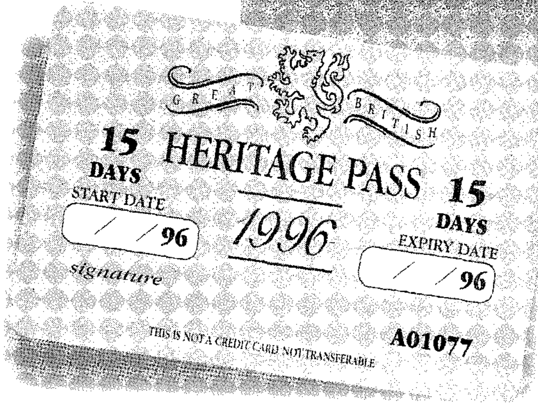
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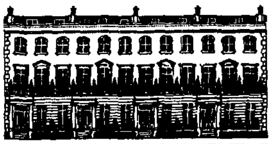
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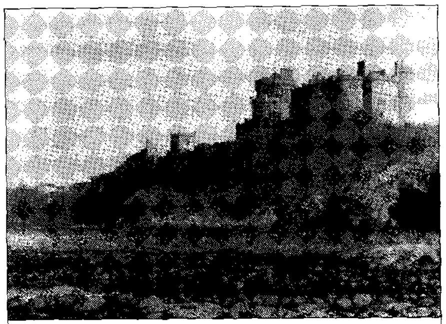

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One side of the multi-faceted Castle Ward.

Northern Ireland

Though compact—Northern Ireland is only 85 miles from top to bottom—this verdant region will surprise visitors with the wealth of riches she has to offer, including stately historic homes and gardens, exquisite crafts and fascinating local lore.

Perched majestically on an expanse of parkland sloping toward the shore of Strangford Lough (lake) stands Castle Ward. With its split personality—half the house is constructed along classical lines, the other, Gothic—Castle Ward is inarguably one of the most unusual homes in Europe. The park too, displays more than a touch of whimsy with a formal canal, rock garden and an exotic Victorian sunken garden. Open to visitors, the estate plays host to an opera festival every June.

While the house is charming, the gardens, among the finest in the United Kingdom, are the main attraction at Mount Stewart. A triumph of imaginative landscaping, this series of intricate formal gardens and vistas is beholden to no one fashion. Instead, the range of styles, including an Italian Garden, a Spanish Garden and an English Sunken Garden, is nearly as diverse as the dizzying array of plants that comprise them.

But beauty isn't relegated just to the countryside. The lavishly appointed Grand Opera House, in the city of Belfast, is a masterpiece of Victorian architecture. Directly across the street, the equally enchanting Crown Liquor Saloon is everything a public house should be. With its warm wood interior, fine glass and tiles, and glowing gas lamps, the Saloon is an inviting spot to savor a Guinness and some of the colorful local fare.

While culture flourishes throughout Northern Ireland, one event in particular is worth planning a visit around. The Belfast Festival at Queens, the second-largest arts festival in the UK, animates Belfast every fall. From November 4-23, the city becomes a perpetual stage for all the arts from theatre and ballet to film and an unbelievable array of music. Fashion, too, gets into the act: the Satzenbrau Fashion Showcase is staged during the festival. Here, Northern Ireland's best young designers share the catwalk with some of the top names in fashion. Unlike so many fashion shows in the U.S., this one's open to the general public who turn out in droves.

For more information on traveling to Northern Ireland, call 1-800-326-0036; in NY, 1-212-922-0101.

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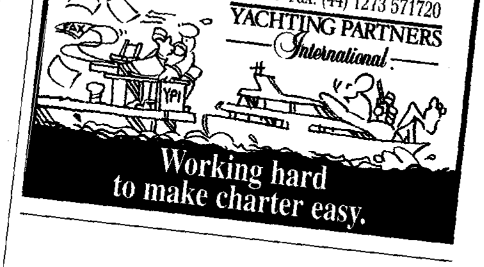

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Wales

The style of Wales emanates from the land, from its strong and magical hold over all who live and visit here. But beyond the intrinsic natural beauty of the country, Wales offers a hoard of stylish treasures.

Though the apparel of Laura Ashley, the great doyenne of Welsh design who found inspiration in her native surroundings, is nearly ubiquitous, one small Ashley jewel remains exclusive to Wales—Llangoed Hall. The brainchild of Ashley's widower, Sir Bernard Ashley, this historic country house on the banks of the River Wye was transformed into an exquisite hotel that embodies a truly Welsh sensibility in its warm and inviting architecture and decor. Sir Bernard's own collection of art and antiques complements the timeless style of this unique hotel which boasts, among other things, a library that dates to the early 17th century.

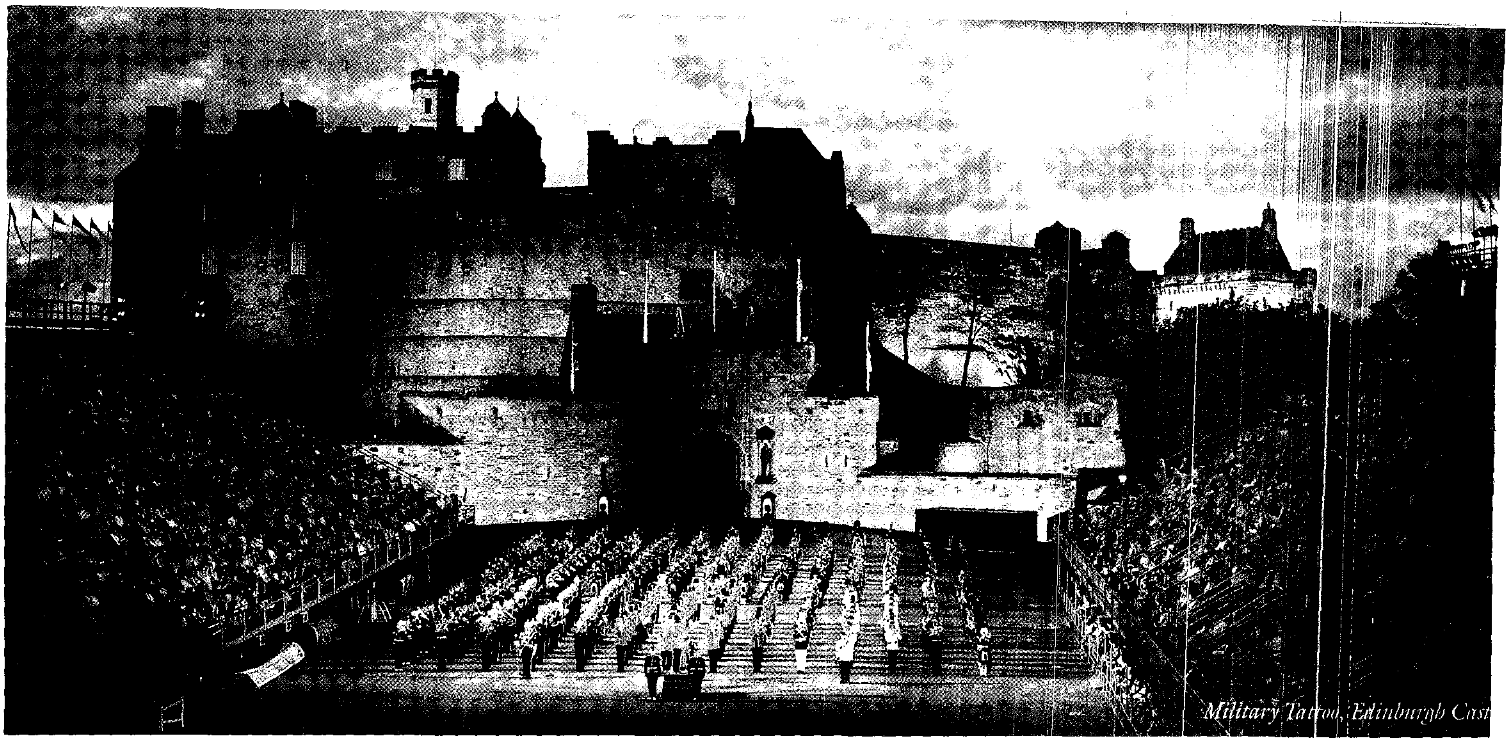
Sir Clough William Ellis, the renowned Welsh architect commissioned to redesign Llangoed Hall in 1912, was also responsible for a slightly more expansive project: he created the famous village of Portmeirion in mountainous North Wales. Described variously as "baroque Italianate" and "vaguely Mediterranean," it was the realization of Ellis's desire to build something fantastical and at the same time demonstrate "that one could develop even a very beautiful site without defiling it, and given sufficient loving care, one could even improve on what God had provided." Construction began in 1925 and finished 48 years later.

At the heart of this distinctive village, set majestically on its own peninsula and keeping benevolent watch over the surrounding sea, sand and mountains, is Hotel Portmeirion. An enchanting jumble of Indian, Oriental and Italian influences, the hotel possesses a beguilingly eclectic nature that mirrors the village's own idiosyncratic character. From the curvilinear dining room peering out over the serene estuary, the hotel appears to be afloat, an illusion enhanced by the stone ship moored permanently outside.

The fabled village has attracted more than a few luminaries. No less a legend than eminent architect Frank Lloyd Wright felt compelled to cross the Atlantic to view Portmeirion and revel in Ellis's extraordinary accomplishment.

See the R.S.V.P. feature in this issue for details on winning a luxury trip for two to Wales.

The village of Portmeirion.



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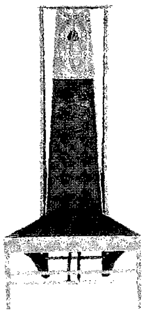
The citywide Edinburgh Festival Fringe.

Come Celebrate The Edinburgh Festival's 50th Anniversary.

Edinburgh, one of Europe's most beautiful capitals, will be going all-out in this 50th year of the Edinburgh International Festival. This world-renowned celebration of the performing arts includes theatrical productions, concerts, operas, ballets, and hundreds of "Fringe" activities—avant-garde performances that spill out onto the streets and squares of the town.


Chair by Charles Rennie Mackintosh.

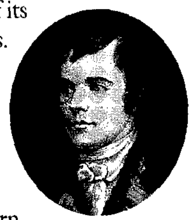
BTA British Tourist Authority

Lending added excitement to the Edinburgh year is the stirring Military Tattoo, with ranks of pipers marching on the esplanade of splendid Edinburgh Castle.

Edinburgh's rich museum collections include the National Gallery of Scotland, with its great works of classic art, while the world of 20th Century art is well represented by the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art.

1996. The Bicentenary of Robert Burns.

Scotland will ring with poetry this year as it celebrates the life and work of its much-loved poet, Robert Burns. The author of "Auld Lang Syne" and "Tam o' Shanter" will be remembered with special events throughout the country. And in Alloway, Ayrshire, where Burns was born, you can visit his cottage and museum, and follow in the poet's footsteps along the Burns Heritage Trail.


Robert Burns

Take in Glasgow's Festival of Visual Arts.

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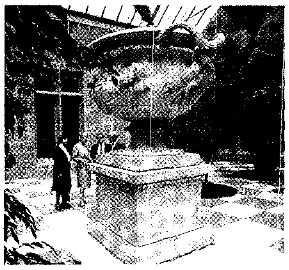
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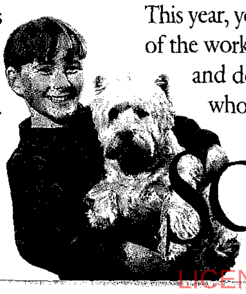


SCOTLAND

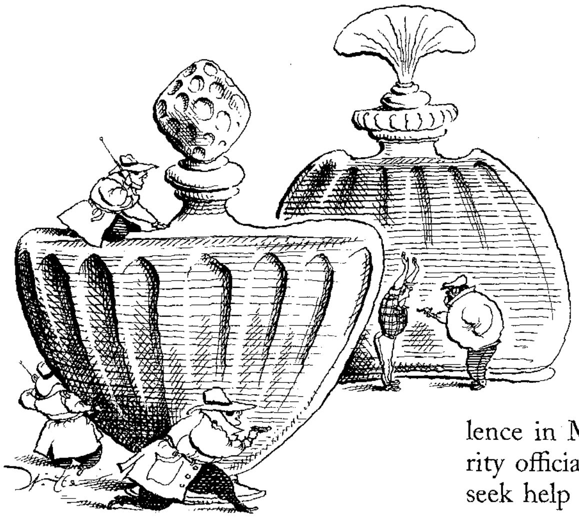
THE NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

CRIMES OF FASHION

ATTORNEY GENERAL JANET RENO will not be mingling with Donna and Calvin and Ralph at this week's fall collections in New York. A spokesman for the Justice Department laughed when he was asked about it. "No, no, no," he said. "She doesn't do fashion shows." But she does do crackdowns on organized crime, and for more than a year now one such crackdown has been quietly under way at the request of security officials in the fashion business. While designers don't like to admit such things in public, they are now targets of sophisticated criminal groups: their goods are being hijacked at airports and on docks, and some of their most profitable products—the perfumes, jeans, T-shirts, and sunglasses that are all indirectly promoted by the splashier, pricier wares on the runways this week—are being copied and mass-produced by highly skilled counterfeiters.

"In the underworld, our cologne is known as liquid gold. They can steal it or counterfeit it and make millions selling it all over the place," says the harried security director for one of the top names in fashion and cosmetics, who has agreed to talk about this seamy side of the fashion business on the condition that his name and that of his employer not be revealed. Sitting in his sleek, airy office in a midtown skyscraper, eating a pastrami sandwich, the security director says, "I'll show you a videotape of a raid where we caught these guys red-handed." He takes a bite of a kosher pickle and hits the play button on a VCR. "Look at this," he says. "Thousands of bottles of damn good counterfeit Armani, Chanel, and Calvin Klein coming out of a state-of-the-art factory set up in an English farmhouse. And the whole thing is being run like a multinational business." He puts in another tape. "Look at those barrels. What we call the juice—the fragrance—was being brought in from Germany, the bottles from Korea, and the packaging from Bosnia, for God's sake." This particular counterfeiting operation was put out of business, but others are believed to be thriving in such places as Singapore, Taiwan, Dubai, and Mexico—with much of their merchandise ending up in discount stores and flea markets in the United States.



While the counterfeiters have managed to replicate many of the top designer fragrances, they frequently slip up on the flasks. "Sometimes they don't get the pump just right on the spray bottle, and it leaks," the security official says. "And that's when we hear from customers griping about stains on their dresser or in their suitcase."

Investigations have shown that some of the counterfeiting operations are backed by drug syndicates, which use profits from heroin and cocaine sales to invest in factories that produce fragrances and sunglasses. "The industry is fighting an uphill battle," the security man says. "We could grab all the counterfeits from every street vender on Canal Street from now until your grandchildren have grandchildren, and it wouldn't make any difference. You have to take out the factories, and that's tough."

Tougher still are the problems designer houses are having with hijackers and armed robbers. Except for computers and electronics, designer clothes and perfume are the favorite targets of cargo thieves. "This is organized crime," the security director says. "This is very violent. It's bad all over, but the Port of Miami is the worst. We have drivers pistol-whipped down there and hijackings in broad daylight." It was the huge losses and the violence in Miami that finally led security officials in the fashion industry to seek help from the Attorney General.

PART of the problem is of the industry's own making. The big, reputable department stores frequently overstock designers' wares for Christmas, Valentine's Day, and Mother's Day. Leftover inventory is then often sold out the back door to unauthorized "gray market" distributors, who resell it to discount outlets. Because the designers make money from the department stores' large seasonal orders, and because they don't want to alienate the buyers, many designers avert their eyes. The trouble is that "greed takes over," the security man says, and "some overstock guys start to deal in swag"—stolen goods—"and

ILLUSTRATIONS BY MICHAEL WITTE

counterfeit." He smiles and poses a question: "If the bad guys couldn't sell what they steal, they wouldn't steal it, right?"

PRETZEL LOGIC

Bob Dole had swept in and out of Michigan amid murmurs that he might make the state's governor his running mate, and John M. Engler was reacting in the customary fashion: by torturing his syntax to demonstrate false indifference. "That's a topic one does not seek—I do not seek it," Governor Engler said on the day of his state's primary, between visits to two factories outside Detroit. "I'm not campaigning for the job. I don't know how one campaigns for something for which there really can be no campaign."

Neither naïveté nor reticence comes naturally to Engler, a forty-seven-year-old conservative with the look of a Midwestern burgher—partly bald, blindingly Caucasian, about average height, more than a little above average weight—and with the savvy of an old-style machine pol. His specialty is bluster, not fluster. Over the past year or so, thanks both to Newt Gingrich's praise and to his own self-promotion, Engler has become one of the country's most visible governors. Now he finds himself near the top of every shortlist to be Dole's No. 2, including, not least, those of several leaders of the religious right, who seem to have anointed him as the movement's Vice-President of choice.

Yet Engler comes across less as a moralist than as a policy maven: as the epitome of Republican devolution chic. Having overhauled his state's welfare system, cut taxes twenty-one times, and come back from the political dead (at one point, his approval rating sank to thirty-one per cent) to win a landslide reëlection in 1994, Engler became a role model for congressional Republicans—and a fixture on those shortlists. "The speculation isn't based on my personality or good looks," he says. "It's based on what we've done here."

In fact, Engler's accomplishments are a matter of hot dispute. His welfare-to-work program, which he claims has saved taxpayers a hundred million dollars and cut the state's welfare rolls to their lowest levels in twenty years, has been attacked both by liberals, who think it too harsh, and by conservatives, who think it too squishy (a new Engler pilot program was dissed by no less than Charles Murray as being "Bill Clinton's plan"). Similarly, his scheme to cut property taxes and raise sales taxes to finance public schools may produce a dangerous shortfall when the state's economy dips.

For the religious right, however, the most salient feature of Engler's record is that it makes him a plausible alternative to the potential running mate the movement most abhors: Colin Powell. In recent days, as the buzz over Dole's continued interest in the General has intensified, prominent Christian conservatives from Ralph Reed to Gary Bauer and Jeffrey Bell have ostentatiously bestowed their blessing on Engler. "It's not that there's a concerted campaign for him, and it would be the kiss of death if people thought there was," Bell says. "It's just that a fair number of social conservatives find him attractive, and for a lot of the same reasons."

First, and crucially, Engler is adamantly anti-abortion. Unlike some Republicans, who turn squeamish when confronted with the position in their party's platform—to ban all abortions, even in cases of rape, incest, and threat to the woman's life—Engler exhibits no qualms. More broadly, he is Catholic, and might therefore appeal to a group of voters that Republicans lost to Clinton in 1992 but won in 1994, and that Reed is aggressively courting. "Roman Catholics are now the swing vote in American politics," Reed has said, "and whoever wins that vote will be able to govern America for the remainder of this century."

John M. Engler

Despite all this, Engler is no shoo-in. His decision to wait to endorse Dole until he had effectively locked up the nomination annoyed many of the Senator's advisers, who suspect that Engler was hedging his bets and not, as he claimed, that his position as chair of the Republican Governors Association obliged him to remain neutral. "There's no chemistry between them, either, no strong relationship," a senior Dole strategist says. But to the relentlessly pragmatic Dole the case for Engler must still seem sound. Engler would prevent a convention crackup over abortion, improve Dole's prospects in Michigan, and give the ticket a patina of policy wonkery, while displaying an oratorical style heavy on slogans ("Michigan is driving America's Renaissance") and light on flair, which would create no embarrassing contrast with Dole's own deficiencies.

For his part, Engler insists, "I'm not expecting him to call." But even the clearest-eyed realists nurture fond hopes. On the day of the primary, one of Engler's aides was toting a bag of pretzel sticks the size of small hammers. "They've got no fat—and the Governor's on a diet," his press secretary said. He smiled when reminded of a joke often repeated among Michigan political people, that the most obvious sign of an impending campaign is the sight of Engler losing weight. "I don't know why he went on the diet. One day he just said, 'I think it's time to slim down.' "

GRAVLAX AND GRIDLOCK

The tipoff that the new Harlem Fairway is urban, not suburban, is more than the river's-edge entrance hard by an exit ramp of the Henry Hudson Parkway, or the trace of anxiety in shoppers' eyes—as though the existence of a low-priced, inviting food bazaar in supermarket-deprived Manhattan might be a figment of the imagination. By philosophy, the store reflects poles of the city's population that seldom meet, except on the subway: jaded Upper East Siders and Spanish-speaking housewives, frugal academic types from Morningside Heights and Harlemites hungry for services, second-home owners returning to the fray from bucolic weekends and workaday New Yorkers of all stripes bused in and out via Fairway's upper-Broadway shuttle. When necessary, wall labels serve as hostesses, making introductions. Yuca: "Resembles long, narrow sweet potatoes covered with bark. Substitute for potatoes. Must be cooked." Saladini: "A unique salad mainly composed of thousands of sprouts . . . Eat out of hand.”

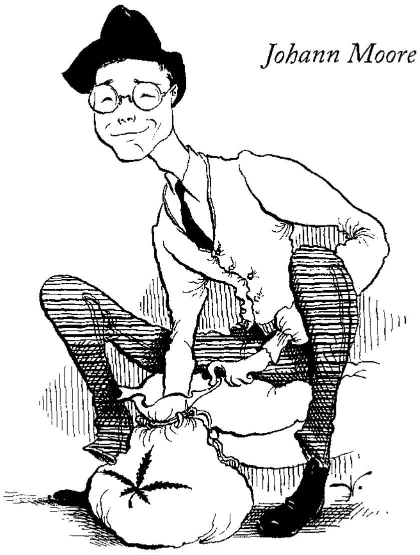
Calabaza, plátanos, boniatos, and other nutritious staples are piled high near the front door in a welcome gesture to Fairway’s immediate neighbors. A few steps away, another social set gets its own symbolic greeting with hedgehog mushrooms, tiny baby squashes, and edible flowers calling out seductively. In the capacious “cold room” (jackets provided), shoppers have the opportunity to hoist into their carts more cholesterol than many people nowadays eat in a lifetime—huge bags of smoked neck bones, prewrapped pork fatback, sweet-sausage combos, uncut blocks of butter, margarine by the three-pound tub, and pasteurized processed American cheese, sliced and bundled into unspeakably long packages. At the end of the aisle sit stacked-up bottles of spring water. Contrasts abound in the bakery and deli, too: onion ficelle and sweet-potato pie, Medusa Italian anchovies and meat loaf, gravlax and Buffalo wings. And then, when you wheel your groceries out the door, there’s no buffer: you’re spewed directly into a gridlock of traffic—the only downside of this optimistic experiment in urban pioneering.

“This place has become a cultural happening,” says Joseph Fedele, one of the four owners, who is upbeat despite recent zoning tangles with the Department of Buildings. (Both he and city officials anticipate an amicable settlement.) “You have people with half a million dollars come in with their chauffeur and stand in line next to someone on welfare. Their kids start talking, and then *they* start talking. I could tell you a million stories.”

THE GRASS MENAGERIE

DOWNSTAIRS at a lower-Manhattan bar, in a room filled with black-light posters and tie-dyed drapes, Johann Moore was hunched over, rifling through a large canvas tote bag. “Hi, Johann,” called out a muscular man in sideburns and a taut T-shirt that said “Adventure Vacation.” “You busy today?”

“Not really,” Moore said. Actually, the small alcove was filling up with members of the New York Medical Marijuana Buyers’ Club—mostly people with AIDS, who gather salonlike in this basement every Tuesday from five-thirty to six-thirty. (Moore explained that the bar’s owner “sort of looks the other way.”) The club, a two-year-old spinoff of ACT-UP, claims some thirty members, who suffer from symptoms that pot helps assuage, like nausea or sleeplessness. To these people, unlike the Mayor—who recently announced that people caught lighting up in certain public places would be arrested rather than issued a summons—“quality of life” means smoking a little weed and then finally holding down a meal. On a chintz couch sat two men and a woman, hollow-cheeked but robust; three others were propped on another sofa, which was largely depilated of its swirling velvet nap. A stylish man, unable to catch his breath, pressed a hand over a lung, fingers and rings splayed wide.


Johann Moore

In his narrow tie, cardigan, and Perma-Prest slacks, and with his awkward demeanor, Moore doesn’t look like a drug dealer or an AIDS activist. He suffers not from AIDS but from chronic-fatigue syndrome, which compromises his “entire psychoneuroimmunological system.” (He’s on welfare while appealing a rejection of his disability claim.) “Pot allows me to rise up above the pain and reach a moment of grace,” he said. Every day, he rolls and smokes one W. C. Fields-size joint, providing for enough moments of grace to run the Medical Marijuana Buyers’ Club, which he founded. It is his only job, and his main vexation.

Last August, when the club was temporarily locked out of its meeting place, Moore imprudently set up shop on a street corner, where he was busted by a vanload of housing cops. He was found with eight stout Baggies’ worth of marijuana, forty grams in all, and charged with criminal sale in the fourth degree—a Class A misdemeanor. His lawyer, Ruth Liebesman, has rejected plea offers and pressed for a jury trial, which is set for April 3rd. Even when the D.A.’s office proposed a deal that would have expunged Moore’s record if he stayed out of trouble for six months, the defense rejected the offer: Moore refused to stay out of trouble for six months. Without him, the Tuesday salons would not happen.

He had hoped for an outpouring of support from the AIDS community, but it hasn’t come. Now he handed each new arrival a leaflet about the trial, hoping that club members would agree to testify. “It’s a jury trial, and that’s the smallest-scale revolution there is,” Moore said to a man shouldering a Kenneth Cole bag. “Thirteen people at a time, we can educate the population about medical marijuana.” The Kenneth Cole fellow didn’t commit. He shot thirty dollars to Moore, who produced two full Baggies and pressed them into the man’s palm. The street price would have been a hundred and twenty dollars. “We have Mexican right now, which is tasty,” Moore announced. “Autumn crop.”

Moore enforces just one rule: anyone wishing to join the club must provide proof of illness. A potential club member plucked a wallet from tight jeans and said, “I have my G.M.H.C. card.” Glancing at it, Moore said, “That’s cool.”

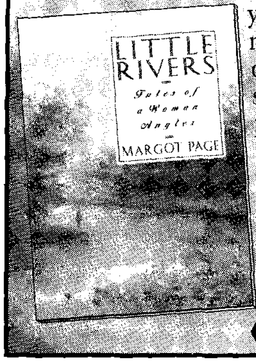
Marijuana is “a folk medicine,” he said. “For malabsorption, for energy, and . . .”

“And the appetite,” a man with Nautilus biceps offered.

“Right? That’s how it helps me,” said a slight Latino man in his twenties. “I went to the doctor—I weighed one-forty-five, now I’m one-fifty, which is good.” He folded his bills and passed them to Moore.

The woman on the chintz sofa rose grandly and bought four bags, then kissed Moore’s hand. When everybody left, having unburdened Moore of thirty bags of pungent cannabis and his stack of flyers, he put on a fedora and headed toward SoHo, absolutely spent by the experience. At the corner of Broome and Wooster, he began a Tuesday-night ritual, lighting a tattered joint and breathing in luxuriously. ◆

“Crimes of Fashion,” Ira Silverman; “Pretzel Logic,” John Heilemann; “Gravlax and Gridlock,” Suzanne Mantell; “The Grass Menagerie,” David France.



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LETTER FROM WASHINGTON

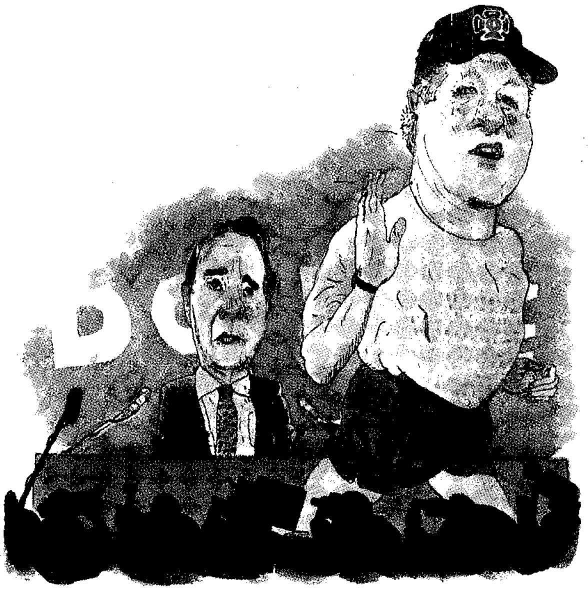
ACCENTUATE THE NEGATIVE

Bob Dole is old, taciturn, and stoic, and he doesn't have any new ideas. It just might work for him.

BY MICHAEL KELLY

TWO days after winning the Super Tuesday primary contests in seven states and, for all practical purposes, clinching the Republican nomination for the Presidency, Senator Bob Dole boarded his campaign plane, a chartered 727 that bears the unfortunate name Leader's Ship, and flew from Washington, D.C., to Michigan to begin his general-election race against Bill Clinton. Dole's first stop was the commercial-industrial sprawl of Auburn Hills, at the offices of Haden, Inc., a company that, among other activities, processes paint sludge. Paint sludge is what is left over after a new car is painted. It looks like what dredgers pull up from the bottom of New York Harbor: a thick, blue-gray ooze with a faint petrochemical glow. The Haden company has developed a method of recycling this niche creature of industrial waste into something useful, a type of sealer for auto bodies. For five minutes, Dole stood for the cameras in front of a large sludge-drying machine. Next to the machine and the candidate was a sign that said, "Over Two Hundred Million Pounds of Paint Sludge Are Produced in North America Every Year."

Then Dole flew to Battle Creek, where he addressed an airport crowd of about three hundred. The candidate stood at a lectern on a raised platform. Taped to the lectern were two pages of talking points, printed in large letters. Most candidates, delivering their basic speech three or four times a day, rely on talking points, which are refined from stop to stop to localize the speech and perhaps drive home a particular message. Battle Creek was where the Second World War ended for Dole, recovering in Percy Jones General Hospital from crippling wounds that wasted his frame from a hundred and ninety-four pounds to a hundred and twenty-two, and left his right hand frozen in a permanent crook. The message for Battle Creek was that Dole, a wounded war hero, was a representative of the generation that had built the American Century—in obvious contrast to Bill Clinton.



Introducing Bob Dole, the anti-Clinton.

BARRY BLITT

This is how Dole's printed talking points began:

> There are a lot of memories here. This is a place that helped shape the person I am today.
>
> A lot of brave men and women came here after World War II, and some of them never left. Those of us who did leave became much stronger individuals. We've been tested by fire and tested under fire, and we've made it.
>
> Two years ago on the anniversary of D Day, I went back to Italy. . . . And, standing in those Italian hills, I thought there was one more mission for my generation, one more call to serve. I thought my generation might have something the country needs right now in a President. Someone who knows what made America great in the first place. Someone who knows the sacrifices made to keep us free. Someone who knows the way to lead America back to her place in the sun.

This is what Dole, standing at the lectern, and not looking at the talking points, actually said:

> Thank you. Can you hear me? Can you hear me on the right? Well, I want to thank you for the Dole pineapple and the Dole bananas. Thank you very much. Let me say that, as many of you know, Battle Creek has a lot of special memories. I sort of recovered in Battle Creek. It took a long time, but I've always thought a lot of Battle Creek, and I'm happy to be here again, and to see a lot of people out here this afternoon. I think you only had about forty-eight hours' notice, and we appreciate it very much. We're gonna do it. I'm gonna go up later and find the room I was in for a couple of years, in what used to be Percy Jones General Hospital. I'm not sure I'll remember it, but if they say "This is the room," then I'll say, "O.K., this is the room."

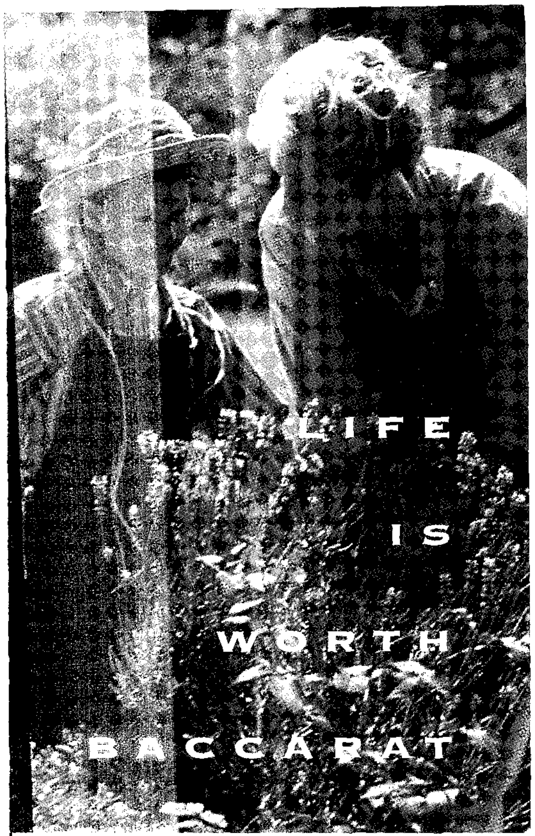
He went on like this for fifteen minutes, making his way through his speech briskly but aimlessly, like a man taking a fast hike through some not very interesting woods. Whenever he did recall one of his talking points, it was as if he had unexpectedly come across something interesting in the underbrush, and he would pick it up and put it down wherever he happened to be at the moment (he dropped in the central point about the one last mission for his generation in his closing), and then meander off again. He stood very straight, and the stiff breeze cutting across the tarmac whipped his dark suit trousers against his thin legs, making him seem, for a moment, quite frail.

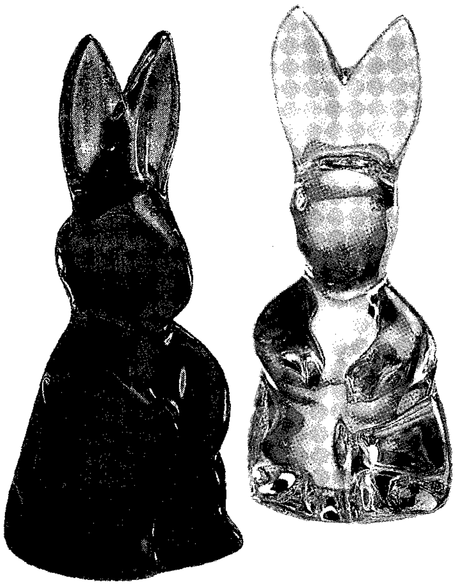
Afterward, the seventy-two-year-old Dole worked the crowd. It is obvious that he does not love this part of politics. He moved stiffly and warily, jerkily following the cues of his aides, part of whose job is to shield his right side from touch. But he performed the task with attentive dignity, making an effort to listen and respond to each person. "Say hello to Clinton for us," one man said. "I'll tell him goodbye," Dole replied, speaking out of the corner of his mouth, as he does when he is getting off something funny and subversive. Several people asked for his autograph. Because of his crippled right hand, Dole cannot, like any other politician, simply grab the paper in one hand and scrawl his name with the other. At each request, an aide steadied the paper to be signed on a tablet he held in front of Dole, and the candidate signed his name slowly, awkwardly, with his good left hand. He carried the difficulty lightly, though. "You've got a short name—that helps," he said to one autograph seeker.

Next, it was time for the main event of the day—the visit by Dole and a pool of journalists to the place where he had been from November, 1945, until July, 1948, recuperating from his wounds. Percy Jones General Hospital has since become a federal office complex, and Dole's old ward was in the process of being converted into a new office. The concrete floor was covered with dust from the construction work, and loose wires hung from the ceiling. Dole, with a white hard hat perched on his head, looked around the empty room. "Is this it?" he asked. A seventy-nine-year-old man named Eldon Draime, who had been a physical therapist at the hospital when Dole was a patient there, showed the Senator a piece of concrete on which was written, in pencil, the names of two patients and the date December, 1942. Draime also presented the Senator with a piece of green tile from the bathroom. "I probably stood on this tile," Dole said.

The reporters pushed the candidate to express emotion. "It was an experience I had," Dole responded. "I learned a lot about myself and about other people. It was a great hospital. We had great nurses. In fact, I probably could have learned to feed myself sooner if the nurses hadn't been so attractive." A reporter asked Dole if he had ever felt like giving up. "I don't think so," he said. "You go through a period of sort of 'Why me?' and all that, but I think after a while you have to say when you see somebody else, who is worse off than you are, 'How lucky can you get?' "

If Bill Clinton had been in Bob Dole's position that day, he would have learned everything that there was to know about paint sludge and would have immediately worked up a riff about the Haden company's pioneering work as a metaphor for what needed to be done in America. He would have incorporated a rough version of this riff into his speech to company employees, and by the end of the day he would have had it down so smoothly that it would have sounded like something he had been saying for years. After the speech, he might have led the employees in an impromptu "town meeting," in which he would have exhibited both his deep empathy for their concerns and his vast knowledge of how those concerns might be met. At the airport rally in Battle Creek, he would have had his talking points firmly in his head, and he would





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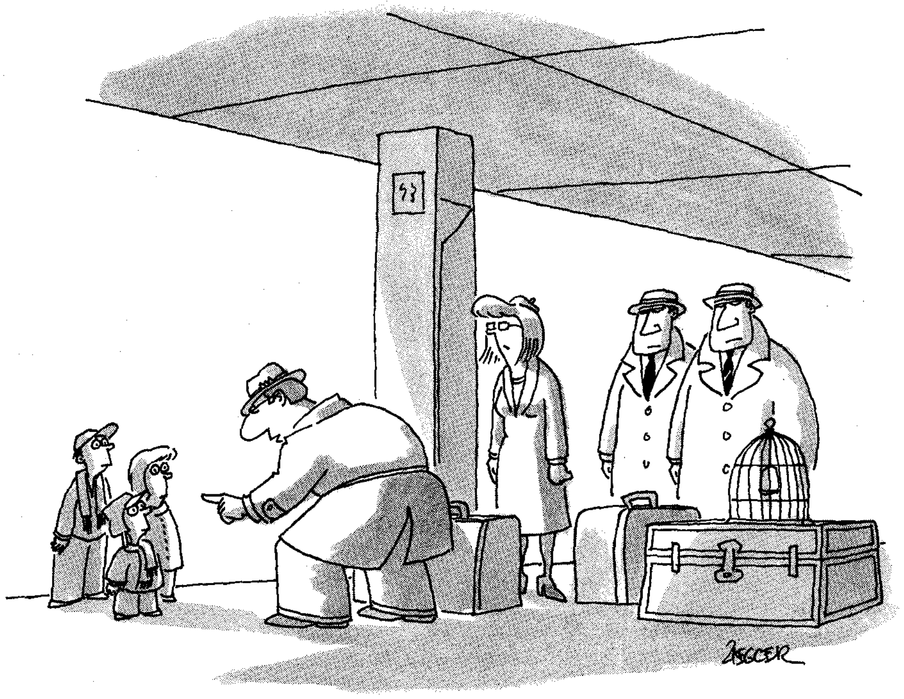

"O.K., who has to go potty before we disappear into the Federal Witness Protection Program?"

• •

have hit them over and over, with passion and ringing clarity, until the light was shining in the dimmest bulb among his listeners. At the rope line, somebody would have hugged him, and he would have hugged back. In his old ward at the hospital, recalling his suffering—and, even more, the suffering of others—he would have moved the hardened journalists to tears. He would have moved himself to tears.

That Dole cannot perform at a level even remotely like Clinton's—that the performance he turned in that day in Michigan was standard, humdrum fare—has been a great source of worry to his advisers and supporters. It shouldn't be. Dole's non-Clintonian qualities are the reason he has a decent chance of becoming the next President of the United States. By accident, by instinct, and, to an increasing extent, by design, Dole is sharpening a persona for the 1996 race. He is running as the anti-Clinton. This is not the strategy of an ideal candidate, but it may be an ideal strategy for a candidate of Dole's particular qualities facing a candidate of Clinton's particular qualities. Playing off Clinton, Dole is seeking to turn into assets his liabilities—his age, his inarticulateness, his determinedly undramatic pragmatism, his shyness, his old-fashionedness—while reminding voters of what they do not like about Clinton: his adolescent self-indulgences, his talkiness, his overpromising, his slickness. It is Elvis against Bogart, the Vietnam War boomers against the Good War generation, the man of many words against the man of few, the feeler of your pain against the tough guy who doesn't even feel his own.

THE Dole campaign is doing all it can to develop and heighten this natural contrast. The campaign's emerging message, several Dole advisers told the *Times*' Elizabeth Kolbert last week, is to contrast Clinton "the talker" with Dole "the doer." It is a message that is woven through Dole's speeches. When Dole's campaign staff describes him as "the Comeback Adult," playing off Clinton's Comeback Kid self-appellation, the point is being made in one way. When Dole calls Clinton Old Veto Bill, lambasting him for promising such popular measures as welfare reform but then vetoing the reforms when Congress passes them, it is being made in another. In the next phase of the race, which will be fought out in political-legislative maneuvers between the White House and the Hill, the Republicans will propose a series of measures—in areas such as taxes, spending, crime, and welfare—that Clinton will be obliged by the realities of Democratic politics to promise to veto, thus further driving home the distinction between the man of action and the man of words.

"Bill Clinton is already defined in the minds of the American people," says Governor Steve Merrill, of New Hampshire, who is the chairman of the Dole campaign. "They know he is glib and loquacious and telegenic. That can end up as a negative if they believe that, as good as the speech is, he won't deliver on it anyway. Bob Dole can win this matchup by giving people a sense of confidence that, in contrast, he will get the job done. The Dole message is: This man is real. Bill Clinton is the opposite. He is an MTV, fluffy, modern candidate with appeal but no commitment to deliver. Our strategy is to build on this rather than run from it."

At the heart of the Dole approach is an elegant bit of political jujitsu. Essentially, the idea is to counter Clinton's strategy of "triangulation," which has brought him approval ratings in the low fifties—some of the highest of his Presidency—and has made him the front-runner in the 1996 race. Stripped of the euphemisms of political jargon, triangulation is an effort by Clinton to position himself far enough to the right to win a majority of the basically conservative swing vote without jeopardizing his support among the liberal voters who constitute the heart of the national Democratic Party. It is fair to say that Clinton triangulates because he must: he has little choice, given that his party's core is at odds with the rest of the nation in critical areas like taxes, welfare, crime, and cultural values. It is also fair to say that Clinton triangulates because he is a natural at it. In dealing with Clinton, Dole faces a competitor who (as Clinton did in his State of the Union address) can declare that "the era of big government is over" while simultaneously proposing a new, hundred-and-twenty-five-million-dollar government entitlement program—a non-means-tested college scholarship for the top five per cent of academic achievers graduating from every high school. It is almost impossible to beat Clinton at his own game: no one can outpromise Clinton, and no one is more adept at setting forth minor or dubious achievements in the brassy rhetoric of triumph and glory.

But triangulation requires—to some degree, at least—talking one way and acting another, and this increases Clinton's greatest vulnerability: the widespread perception that he is not to be trusted. The idea behind the emerging Dole persona—in fact, the thrust of the entire Dole campaign—is to endlessly raise the Clinton character issue. This will be done mostly by indirection, by emphasizing the personal contrast between Dole and Clinton. The conceit is to turn Dole's campaigning weaknesses into character strengths and to turn Clinton's campaigning strengths into character weaknesses.

This strategy is admittedly an exercise in making a virtue out of necessity. It is pointless to argue that Dole has some sort of overarching vision for the future; he is in his soul an in-box man, having machined himself, during nearly three decades in the Senate, to deal competently with what needs to be dealt with, not to rhapsodize about what might be. It is pointless to argue that he is articulate: his inability to string his thoughts together into something that parses for English can bring pity to the heart of a listener. It is pointless to argue that he is a Washington outsider: he has been in the Senate since 1969, and he has the usual track record of a veteran legislator—a history of deals cut, campaign contributions accepted, favors done, positions revised (on abortion, most notably). It is pointless to argue that he does not have a dark side: Dole's deep knowledge of the falsities and ironies and absurdities of life—a knowledge he came by honestly, in his war experiences—emanates from him in ways he cannot hide or even stop himself from expressing. All Dole's wit is theme and variation on the idea: As if it mattered.

Dole's strategy seeks not to deny his limitations but to celebrate them, to accentuate the negative. The appeal is based not on seduction but on authority, on the promise not of grand things but of getting the job done, not on knowing everything but on knowing what to do. In this strategy, time is working on the Senator's side. Four years ago, the Bush campaign was driven to distraction by its inability to convince voters that Clinton was dissembling about what he had done in the past and about what he would do in the future. Mary Matalin, the Bush campaign's political director, sank to the level of issuing a press release about "Slick Willie" that began, "Snivelling Hypocritical Demo-

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crats: Stand Up and Be Counted. On Second Thought, Shut Up and Sit Down!" The Bush crowd came across as desperate and rude, while Clinton, thanks to his remarkable ability to talk his way through the most embarrassing and difficult situations, appeared a victim of unfair attacks. He won the benefit of the doubt—and, of course, the election.

But in 1992 the idea of Clinton as a slippery character was novel—at least, outside Arkansas—while it is now a commonplace. The President's ambivalent approaches over the last four years to an array of issues, ranging from the balanced budget and middle-class tax cuts to the ban on homosexuals in the military and campaign-finance reform—combined with Whitewater, Travelgate, Troopergate, and Paula Jones—have changed the political landscape. "We don't now have the knowledge gap that existed then about Clinton," argues Matalin, who is now a television commentator and talk-show host. "Now people know he is veracity-challenged, and either they have chosen to write it off and hunker down or they are appalled by it. What we need to do on the character issue this time is what I tried unsuccessfully, abysmally, to do in '92, and that is to connect the patterns of personal behavior to patterns of behavior in policy and government. We've got to connect the dots on it, but this is something that will be easier to do now than it was then."

Against this backdrop, Dole does not have to engage in the unseemly business of mudslinging; he can imply rather than accuse. Interviewed by Ted Koppel on ABC's "Nightline" last week, he did not even have to raise the Clinton character issue; a deferential Koppel did it for him. "What about Bill Clinton?" Koppel asked Dole as the two men sat comfortably in armchairs by the fire in the Senate Majority Leader's office. Dole listened with an agreeable smile as Koppel continued, "You're far too polite a man and you've been in this city much too long to indicate that he ever lied to you, but you have suggested that the President has sometimes given you assurances which later on perhaps were *not* carried out."

Dole responded with a restraint that nicely underscored Koppel's point. "Sometimes, maybe it's not the President, maybe it's the people around him," he said. "You wonder, after you've talked with him, if anything's going to happen."

Later, Koppel returned to the subject, asking Dole if he intended to stress the character issue in the campaign.

"I don't think so," Dole said. "My view is that I'm going to talk about Bob Dole, and I've been doing a little of that. Not crazy about it. It doesn't come easy to talk about: Who is Bob Dole? What's he all about? Where's he from? Has he ever had a problem in his lifetime? Has he ever had a struggle? Is he like the people in the audience?"

Koppel pushed: "But you're not going to go negative on Bill Clinton?"

"I'm not going to go negative," Dole replied. "I've never raised Whitewater."

And, indeed, on the campaign trail Dole does not talk about Whitewater, and he does not question the President's integrity. (He doesn't have to, of course. His campaign co-chairman, New York's Senator Alfonse D'Amato, has taken care of that with his protracted Whitewater hearings.) What Dole does do is more subtle, and probably more effective. A March 14th speech in Columbus, Ohio, to a cheering crowd of G.O.P. partisans provided an excellent example of Dole's approach.

Dole on Clinton: "When Bill Clinton comes to Ohio, he'll probably talk like Governor Voinovich—he'll talk like a Republican. . . . He'll come on, look you straight in the eye—and he is a good talker—and he'll say, 'We've got to do this. We've got to do this. We're going to end welfare as we know it. We're going to balance the budget. We're going to have tax cuts for families with children,' and on and on and on. And what does he deliver? The biggest tax increase in the history of America."

Dole on Dole: "I am very proud to be from Russell, Kansas, population fifty-five hundred. My dad went to work every day for forty-two years and proud of it, and my mother sold Singer sewing machines . . . to try to make ends meet. Six of us grew up living in a basement apartment. That was Bob Dole's early life, and I'm proud of it, because we learned a lot about values, about honesty and decency and responsibility and integrity and self-reliance and loving your God, your family, your church, and your community. . . . Like a lot of young men and women . . . I went off"—to war. "First I went to Brooklyn College for a while for a specialized Army training program. Here I was from Russell, Kansas, and on Flatbush Avenue—that was a big change. Well, I learned a lot in Brooklyn College. Went to the top of the Empire State Building. It was the greatest thing that ever happened to me in my life, the highest I'd ever been."

I don't think Dole intended a sly dig with the phrase "the highest I'd ever been." But the audience took it as such: as a reference to one of Clinton's seminal moments of character definition—his 1992 statement that he had smoked marijuana but had not inhaled. Laughter rose up from the floor, and Dole caught what was happening and grinned delightedly. "The highest I'd ever been," he repeated, milking it. He waited a beat or two—Jack Bennyesque timing is his most lethal weapon—and then allowed a little look of dawning comprehension to cross his face, as if he had just figured out what the folks were laughing at. He hastened to correct the misapprehension. "There are not too many tall buildings in Russell, Kansas," he said. "Our skyline is pretty level. That's what I meant."

MAYBE the conventional wisdom is right, for once. Maybe the obvious candidate will win in 1996. Bill Clinton is the incumbent, and he has a record of accomplishment to point to: on his watch, more than eight million jobs have been created, and the deficit has been appreciably reduced. And, being Clinton, he will make a convincing case for achievements not yet quite achieved: balancing the budget, reforming welfare, reinventing government. Clinton, who is twenty-three years younger than Dole, is commensurately faster and sturdier on his feet, and he is unbloodied by primary challenges. Clinton is a man of this time, and Dole is a man of a time that has passed. But if I were running Clinton's campaign I would be a little bit worried about how curiously affecting Bob Dole is when he talks in his awkward, halting way about being a kid from Russell, Kansas, going off to the Army, and how well he played that accidental laugh. ♦

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[*From the Jacksonville* (*Fla.*) *Florida Times-Union*]

Criticizing those who wanted more time to consider whether to hire personal assistants, she said:

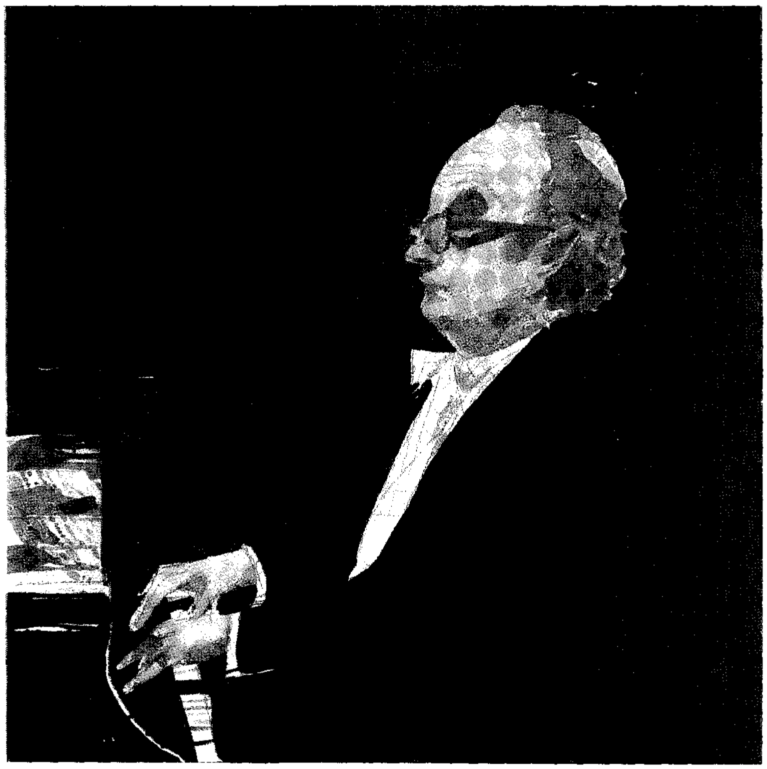
"Those who don't have the balls to go ahead and do what they need to do, and bite whatever bullet or whatever ball they need to bite, then they ought to allow some of us to bite it."

THE PLAYFUL PIANIST

Alfred Brendel, widely considered to be the world's greatest classical player, is not at all what you might expect.

BY A. ALVAREZ

ON a mild and shining summer day in London five years ago, I was walking on Hampstead Heath with Alfred Brendel, who is generally reckoned to be the world's greatest living classical pianist. Two pretty girls approached us, deep in conversation. When they had passed, I said, "What I hate about getting old is not that they don't respond anymore; they don't even see me." Brendel looked embarrassed. "Actually, that is not a problem I have," he replied. I had known Brendel for a decade, and that was the first time he had ever indicated, even obliquely, that he might be famous.



Brendel says, "I have a great need to learn what the norm is by dealing with what is not the norm—with the grotesque and the fantastic."

ROBERT ANDREW PARKER

Despite his classical tastes, Brendel is an anarchic spirit, so fame is not something he cares much about. In December of 1993, he was elected an Honorary Bencher of the Middle Temple of the Inns of Court in London—an honor that British lawyers bestow on only very few and very distinguished outsiders. Brendel began his speech of thanks by listing all the reasons that he should *not* have been chosen. "I did not come from a musical or intellectual family," he said. "I am not Eastern European. I am not, as far as I know, Jewish. I have not been a child prodigy. I do not have a photographic memory; neither do I play faster than other people. I am not a good sight reader. I need eight hours' sleep. I do not cancel concerts on principle, only when I am really sick. My career was so slow and gradual that I feel something is either wrong with *me* or with almost anybody else in the profession. Literature—reading and writing—as well as looking at art have taken up quite a bit of my time. When and how I should have

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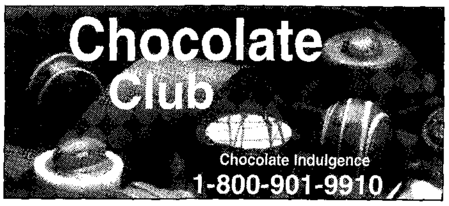

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room and room as though
her whole life of resistance
had been for this one purpose:
on the last minute of the last day
she would drink and have it, ballooning
like a gravid salmon or the moon.

—KAY RYAN

learned all those pieces that I have played, besides being a less than perfect husband and father, I am at a loss to explain."

Brendel is a subtle man with a sly sense of humor, and he knew better than anyone else that his apparent disqualifications were precisely the reasons he was being honored. He is especially venerated in England, where he lives, because he does not fit the stereotype of the great performer. He is not noticeably temperamental, and is curiously lacking in self-importance onstage. "I love the way he just comes in and gets on with it," one of his admirers said recently. "He gives you austerity, not showmanship." He also has many interests outside the closed world of music. He is well read in two languages—German and English. He writes well about music, contributes to *The New York Review of Books*, and has published two collections of essays. He has an idiosyncratic collection of art—tribal, ancient, and modern—and a passion for Dada and kitsch. The same admirer said, "Everything about him is Jewish except him."

Brendel lives in Hampstead, an area full of Jewish intellectuals, like West End Avenue, and appears very much at home there. He is tall and bespectacled, with a high forehead, untidy thinning hair, a witty and benign expression, and a trace of what Nora Ephron has called "the white man's overbite." Away from the concert platform, he dresses in sports jacket, cord trousers, crew-neck sweater: more like a university professor than like a famous musician. Even his wife, Irene (Reni), doesn't fit the picture: she is independent and highly intelligent; she is a great reader, like him, and also a keen horsewoman; and she is passionately involved in their three children. In short, she is anything but a maestro's handmaiden.

Brendel is exceptional among musicians for the selflessness with which he plays. He has a wonderful grasp of the structure of each piece, of the way it develops emotionally as well as intellectually, and this makes his playing strangely inward, as though he were following the composer's own train of thought and enabling the audience to share in the act of creation. "He doesn't get in the way of the music," the pianist Imogen Cooper said recently. "The music is just there, and he is literally the transparent vessel for it. He knows what he is doing with every single note, of course, but when he's on form none of this can be noticed." Brendel's friend Sir Isaiah Berlin, who loves music but cannot read a score, said not long ago, "There are two kinds of musician. The virtuosi love playing. That's what virtuosity is: you use the music for some kind of self-exhibitionism. When Shura Cherkassky was asked why he played so fast, he answered, 'Because I can.' The musicians I admire—Schnabel, Toscanini, the Busch Quartet—have a vision of the music they play, not of the playing of it. That is the world to which Brendel belongs. He is totally dedicated to the people he's playing. He takes great trouble with the score in order to get at what he regards as the truth. He studies the composers, he understands them, he enters their skins and tries to enter into the frame of mind in which these notes follow in this particular structure and that beginning leads to this end."

Brendel himself wrote music when he was young. "I am not proud of my own works, and they are tucked away," he told me. "But they informed my musical outlook. I'm still trying to look at the works I play from the composer's point of view. I want to find out how the minds of certain composers work, and how it is that a great composer can express everything."

Composing wasn't the only thing Brendel did in his youth. "I was a genius in those days, like everyone else of seventeen," he has said. "I composed, I painted, I wrote poetry." Brendel, now sixty-five, has become ironic about his early pretensions, and proud of what he didn't have: he did *not* win the Busoni Competition; he came in fourth, winning the Bolzano award in 1949—a year in which no first prize was awarded. Shortly before that—he was seventeen, and a gallery in Graz, Austria, was showing his art—he had given his first, sternly highbrow public recital. Brendel has always been fascinated by the more intellectual aspects of music, like the fugue, where, he said, "one can hear a number of voices and, at the same time, control them individually, with one's fingers." His first recital was called "The Fugue in Piano Literature"; it included Bach, Brahms, and Liszt, and a sonata of his own with a double fugue ("of course," he said), and all the encores were fugues. "That was noticed," he said, and soon afterward the Bolzano award launched his career.

In a world full of child prodigies, this qualified as a delayed start, but Brendel now sees its timing as an advantage. "I was lucky in not having a sensational early career," he said. "My particular talent needed to come on slowly." His acceptance by the public was slow for another reason, too: His subtle performances were at odds with some outlandish stage mannerisms. "I didn't communicate well at first," he told me. "I pulled unbelievable faces, I flailed my arms around all over the place, and sometimes my glasses flew off. Then I saw myself on television, and realized that the way I looked was not the way I played. I also realized that there could be a harmony between the two. So, as I practiced, I kept a mirror to one side of the piano to give me an indirect impression of what I was doing. That way, I gradually learned how to coördinate what I looked like with what the music expressed. I'm still fairly expressive, but now I play in big halls, I've calmed down, and the audience is used to me."

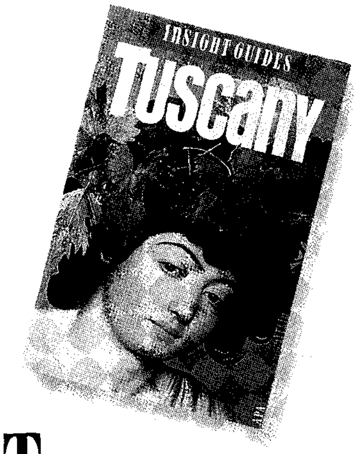
Stagefright was never a major problem for Brendel, perhaps because he was a much loved only child who learned how to perform very young. He was born in Moravia, in 1931, the son of a master builder who soon turned entrepreneur, moving to Yugoslavia when Brendel was three, to run a hotel on the Adriatic island of Krk. "The hotel had a record-player, which I operated for the guests," Brendel said. "The records were of operetta arias, and I'd sing along with them, thinking, I can do that, too. It was my introduction to music as an art." After a couple of years, the family moved to Zagreb, where his father managed a cinema, and it was there that the young Brendel made his first appearance onstage: he played the lead part—a general, with sabre and fez—in a children's play staged in the Zagreb opera house.

His parents had taken piano lessons when they were children—it was the done thing—so when Brendel was six he, too, began to learn the piano. "My piano talent wasn't evident until I was about eleven, and then I more or less took off by myself," he told me. "My mother and father were inseparable, but they were not intellectuals or aesthetic-minded. So, apart from the loving atmosphere at home and the security that that gave me at a certain age, what I have to thank them for most is the fact that I had to find things out for myself." In that period, one teacher strengthened his outer fingers, another told him he was not relaxed enough, but after his first public recital he worked mostly on his own. He made tapes of his playing, and later there were recordings, and these, he says, helped him develop. "They made me listen to myself properly, they enabled me to keep in touch with my own playing, and once you can do that some functions of the teacher become redundant," he said. "Not having teachers meant I was listening to conductors and singers—Bruno Walter, Wilhelm Furtwängler, Otto Klemperer, and the young Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau. They showed me that piano playing was a matter of turning the piano into an orchestra or a singing voice, and only rarely of just letting the instrument speak for itself."

Brendel worked alone not because he was arrogant but because for him music was like his painting and his poetry: each was a separate world, with its own reasons and its own rewards, in which he could also find out about himself. "He needn't have been a pianist," Isaiah Berlin said. "He could have been a painter or a writer—he'd have been a success as either. He chose music because it said more to him."

A crucial influence on Brendel's development was the pianist Edwin Fischer. Brendel first attended Fischer's master classes in 1949, and what he learned there had more to do with an attitude toward music than with technique. "When Fischer sat down and played, he was an example of what a performer can achieve," he told me. "He never boosted his own ego, he was always humble in the face of a composer. In his classes the focus was never on him or the student who was playing—it was on the composer, the compositions, and how you can illuminate them." Imogen Cooper, who was herself profoundly influenced by what she learned from Brendel, thinks that Fischer's influence on Brendel was as crucial as Brendel's was on her. "Once you know how to master the instrument, which is a big task, it's all to do with your inner world," she said. "That, ultimately, is where the talent lies. The key teacher is the one who puts you onto a certain wavelength when you are ready for it." It is as though Fischer introduced the young Brendel not to a career but to a moral and aesthetic universe—the inner worlds of Mozart, Beethoven, and Schubert—and Brendel then dedicated his life to exploring it.

WHEN Brendel's family moved to Zagreb, in 1935, he acquired his own phonograph and a taste for the pop songs coming out of Berlin. These, he thinks, changed his life. "My mother, who was a very serious person, told me the words of one of these nonsense songs, and this influenced my development, though she didn't realize it at the time and wouldn't have told me them if she had," he said. "The song went like this: 'I tear out one of my eyelashes, and I stab you, then I take a lipstick and paint you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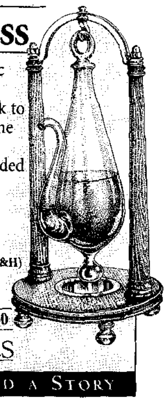
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red. If you are still angry at me, I've got an idea: I'll order scrambled eggs and splash you with spinach.' The lyrics sort of came out of her against her better nature. She'd giggle and say, 'Isn't that silly?' I was very little at the time, but I think it was the beginning of my love of inspired nonsense."

His taste for absurdity helped him survive the war years. (The teen-age Brendel was sent to dig trenches, but en route he was frostbitten and hospitalized, and was rescued by his determined mother.) The way Brendel tells it, his painstaking progress as an artist was always accompanied by a fizzing, anarchic wit. The first questionnaire he filled out about his life—it was from a Swedish newspaper—set the tone: Favorite authors? Shakespeare and Edward Gorey. Favorite painters? Leonardo and Edward Gorey.

Brendel's antic disposition shows itself both in his idiosyncratic taste—Romanesque churches, baroque architecture, Dada, nonsense verse, Gorey, and Gary Larson—and in his playing. He has a highly original talent for bringing out the wit in unexpected composers, especially Beethoven. He once finished a London performance of the Opus 14, No. 2 sonata with an elegant, airy flourish, which provoked a burst of laughter along with the applause. "I'm not hooked on humor but I'm delighted by it," he said. "It makes life more livable and lovable."

His life is arranged accordingly. The Brendels have two houses—one in London, the other in Dorset. Their London house is a gray brick Victorian mansion near Hampstead Heath. Their country house, at Plush, is hidden away in deepest Hardy country, where villages have names like Piddletrenthide. Plush itself is a scattered handful of cottages and a thatched pub. The Brendels' house is on a rise, with a duckpond at its base, and has a view over the village and noble trees all around. The building is Georgian—a wide, deep square—with mid-nineteenth-century additions, which somehow add to its character. The Brendels have built on a simple wing for a swimming pool, because swimming is good for Brendel's overworked muscles. He swims twice a day when he is at Plush—after breakfast and before dinner—always on his back, serenely, as though listening to music in his head.

The new wing fits in well, but there are small details that make the Plush house different from other English country houses. The front door, for example, is flanked by two moonstruck wooden rams from Thailand, painted black and gray, with their eyes, nostrils, and mouths highlighted in red, and in the flagstoned entry hall stand a pair of large wooden horses: one is laughing, the other smiling, and both have an inturned, witty expression, much like the one that Brendel often assumes when he is playing. The walls, too, are hung with the kinds of objects he enjoys: tribal art, modern paintings, Oriental dolls, Dadaesque curiosities. Reni Brendel has made all this blend in with deep sofas, striped wallpaper, and pale flowered curtains.

Brendel devotes a lot of his spare time to looking at pictures, and last October, when I was at Plush, he talked enthusiastically about a big exhibition he had seen of the Dada artist Kurt Schwitters, in Paris. When I got back to London, I mentioned this to the art writer David Sylvester, who often tours galleries with Brendel. "I think it's interesting that the greatest living exponent of the classical repertoire should have this passion for Dada," Sylvester said. "As a musician, he is the one person, above all, who thinks his performances through. You would imagine his favorite artist to be someone like Cézanne, who is at once classical and existential. Maybe Dada is Brendel's id."

Brendel himself does not see it this way. What he loves in Dada is its playfulness. "It's a graceful balancing act that opposes everything, including itself," he said. "It appeals to me because it's liberating. I also collected kitsch, and for me that was an important occupation. It shaped my sense of morals in art. I'm interested in prodigies, because I've always been steeped in the other, rational side. I have a great need to learn what the norm is by dealing with what is *not* the norm—with the grotesque and the fantastic. But not when I'm playing. Art gives a sense of order, life is basically chaotic, and there's a tension between them. A sense of order comes from chaos and contains a bit of it, but it's the sense of order that is important in a work of art. For the performer, it's an order that is in flux, there are always variations on it, and within the

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framework of the composition you can move relatively freely. You have to keep within those confines, but at the same time you have to be aware of all the latent possibilities that give a work its special character—its atmosphere, its moods, its contrasts. A work of art is like a person: it has more than one soul in its breast."

Perhaps Brendel's love of playfulness and absurdity helps keep him sane in his insanely demanding profession, as does his flair for making fun of himself. On the door of his studio in London is an enamelled notice reading "Kirche—Kein Eingang," and he once told me, "If I ever had to write my autobiography, I'd make the whole thing up." He also said he would never hang a serious portrait of himself in his house, but he treasures a little statue of himself as a centaur, complete with spectacles and in full concert gear. One snowy midwinter afternoon, I was walking with him on Hampstead Heath. It was about four o'clock, and what was left of the gray light was beginning to fade. The pond at the Vale of Health was frozen, and boys were skimming stones over the ice. Halfway along the path beside it, Brendel stopped in mid-stride and held up one finger. "Listen," he said. The stones were making curious pinging, twanging notes on the ice. He smiled and said, "Messiaen."

BECAUSE I am a neighbor of Brendel's in London, he sometimes invites me over before a recital to listen while he runs through the program. It probably helps that, like Isaiah Berlin, I cannot read a score, but even if I could, comment is not what Brendel is after. What I assume he wants is a sympathetic and attentive presence in the room, simply to complete the artistic circle. Literature and painting are two-way communications: the poem needs a reader, the painting needs someone to look at it. But music is a three-way exchange—from the score to the interpreter and on to the listener—and the art of performance depends on the relationship between the musician and the audience. In 1974, Brendel wrote, "In the concert hall, each motionless listener is part of the performance. The concentration of the player charges the electric tension in the auditorium and returns to him magnified." These days, he is less optimistic about audiences. "The public sometimes thinks an artist is a television set—something comes out, nothing goes back," he said. "They don't realize that if they can hear me, then I can hear them—their coughs, the electronic beeps from their wristwatches, even the squeaking of their shoes." He also said, "I like the fact that 'listen' is an anagram of 'silent.' Silence is not something that is there before the music begins and after it stops. It is the essence of the music itself, the vital ingredient that makes it possible for the music to exist at all. It's wonderful when the audience is part of this productive silence." In these private sessions, what he needs from me, I think, is silence and attention.

Brendel has two pianos in his studio, and when he first began asking me over, in 1981, he would set my chair off to the side, where I could see him play. It was like watching a conduit under too much pressure: the music seemed to flow through him, from head to fingers to piano, and he was twisted and racked by it. His neck distended, a muscle twitched in his cheek, he pursed his mouth, bit his underlip, then smiled at some particular sweetness. Occasionally, he made little grunting noises or sang sotto voce. In the small room, the sound was intense and reverberating, at times almost choking. Halfway through, Reni brought up tea, and she and I gossiped for a few minutes while Brendel stood fretting pianissimo, not wanting his concentration disturbed. As soon as she left, he sat down again at the piano, head back, eyes closed a moment, neck and cheeks tensed. Then he was playing again—those disciplined cascades of sound.

Now Brendel has moved to a smaller studio, and he seats me directly in front of the instruments. From there, I cannot properly see him, and the effect is strange. Because Brendel has the gift of projecting himself into the heads of the composers he plays and playing as though he himself were thinking out the music for the first time, sitting right in front of the piano while this is happening makes you part of the process. In this smaller room, the sound of the piano is huge. It is like being inside the music, hearing it breathe, exploring its structure as it unfolds around you.

"When I'm with Brendel, I know I'm in the presence of a man of genius," Isaiah Berlin said. "Each time he plays a work it is new and fresh, whereas with lesser musicians it's da capo. With Brendel, there is no question of 'I know how to do

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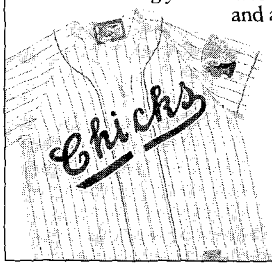

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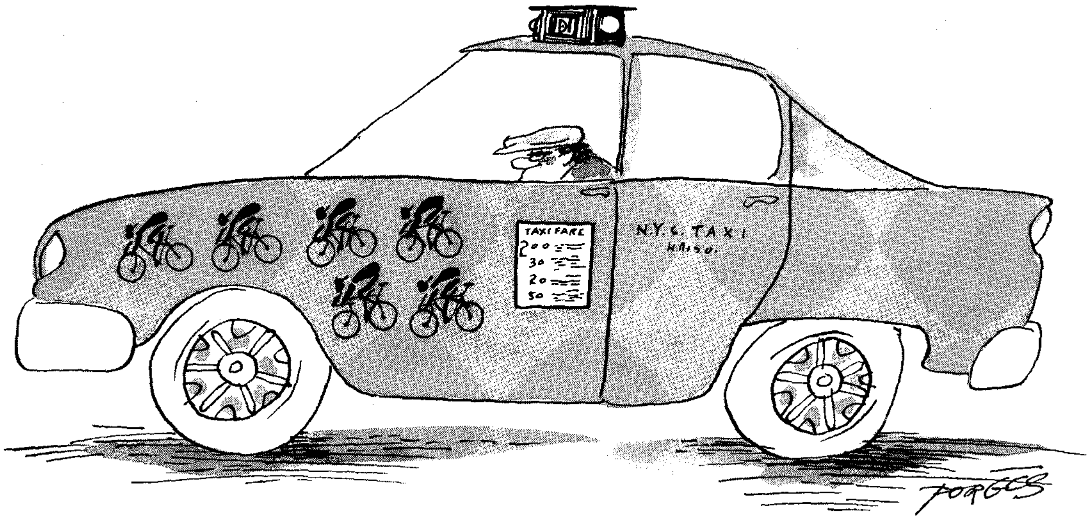

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this.' That's why he looks so tormented when he plays. He doesn't enjoy it. It's a dedicated sacrifice on an altar, an exalted experience."

Those private sessions with Brendel made it clear to me how much a performance cost him. After one of them, when he was soaked with sweat and looked more than usually drained, I asked, inanely, how he remembered it all. He answered, "Memory is not a problem. What matters is the musculature." His body is an instrument that he must care for and respect like his piano—except that he has three pianos and only one body. Last summer, Brendel spent a month in Provence without playing a note—the first time in decades, he said, that he had kept away from the piano for so long—and when he got back to London and began playing again he complained that his little finger was bruised. I must have failed to register an appropriate degree of dismay, because he added, "The little finger has to withstand a lot." He cocked the finger as if to play a note, and a great ridge of muscle rose up along the side of his palm.

The four-week rest had been ordered by a Munich orthopedist, whom Brendel consults because he has recently been having trouble with his neck. Although the doctor has alleviated the pain with injections and massage, there are certain notoriously demanding works that Brendel now feels he should not play: the concertos of Brahms and Liszt, Schubert's "Wanderer Fantasy," Beethoven's "Hammerklavier." Brendel shrugs the problem off, but he has begun to pace himself more carefully. He has always insisted on two or three months each year without professional engagements, so that he can stay home and read and think and be with his family.

Home, however, means a house big enough for everyone to have privacy, which Brendel is addicted to. "I love being on my own, but unfortunately I lack the necessary qualifications," he said. "I never learned to drive or cook. I'm not good at practical things." Despite his impracticality, Brendel is intensely focussed and self-contained as an artist. "He has an extraordinary sense of timing," Reni Brendel said. "Not just of each movement but of every aspect of the performance—the breath and life of a piece, the time it takes to rehearse, the time he needs to practice. When he tours now, I don't go with him as much as I used to. The anonymity of hotel life and the rituals he creates for himself leave him free to concentrate. I provide a home life, full of energy and children, for him to come back to."

Even so, Brendel is finicky about the details of his life. "All my hangups have to do with my constitution and my professional life," he said. "I have to find out how to live comfortably in order to do what I'm doing."

"Everything in his life is very structured," Imogen Cooper said. "He's terribly careful about what he eats and drinks and how his stomach reacts, and he's abnormally sensitive to noise. Barking dogs and noisy hotel rooms upset him almost beyond measure. I think his nerves are closer to the surface than other people's, although it's hard to know how much of this is ultrasensitivity and how much a controlling mechanism that he uses to function to his ultimate capabilities. Yet he's not at all grandiose or arrogant. He's relaxed in himself—a sweetie, really."

Isaiah Berlin agrees, although he puts it differently. "He is a person of absolute moral integrity, and somehow he conveys that as a human being," Berlin said. "Brendel has moral charm, a certain moral purity that conveys itself in a way that is enchanting. The Brendels' is an honorable household."

In Brendel, however, moral charm is coupled with a kind of aesthetic ruthlessness. The first twenty minutes of the first lesson Imogen Cooper had with Brendel, back in 1969, was spent on the opening chord of the slow movement of a Schubert sonata. "He stood with his back to me, saying, 'There's not enough thumb of the right hand,' 'There's too much bass,' 'It sounds heavy—it should sound ethereal,' and I thought I'd never get it right," she said. "Then I did. He turned around and said, 'Thank you. Let's go on to the next bar.' He was never effusive in his praise, and he didn't give much encouragement, but I knew instinctively, from the amount of time he was spending on me, that he thought I was O.K. You have to be strong, but, provided you're on his wavelength musically, you never forget it."

LAST November, in Munich, Brendel played Beethoven's last three sonatas in the bleak Herkulessaal of the Residenz. The good burghers of Munich were older, better dressed, and more sedate than the London audiences, but no less rapt. As usual, Brendel just came in and got on with it, without fuss. The muscles of his jaws worked, sometimes his head went back and he seemed to close his eyes, and at moments of great tenderness he smiled his strange, lost smile. But, because the hall was big and I couldn't see his hands from where I sat, the music just seemed to happen, almost without his intervention. This was the fifth time I had been present when Brendel played the last three Beethoven sonatas—three times before at public recitals in London, and once in his studio—but I had never heard him play them so exquisitely and with such understanding.

One of the most important lessons Brendel taught Imogen Cooper was that there is a tension that goes all the way through a piece of music and never lets up. "He used to talk about the long silver cord that one pulls on," she said. "He'd crouch down beside the piano and say, 'Go on, pull, pull.' Sometimes there's a little kink in the cord, but it never sags. There's always a force irresistibly pulling it from the first note to the last. He used to say, 'You've got to get the audience from the first note.' I'd say you've got to get the audience from the moment you come through the door. It listens with its eyes as well as its ears."

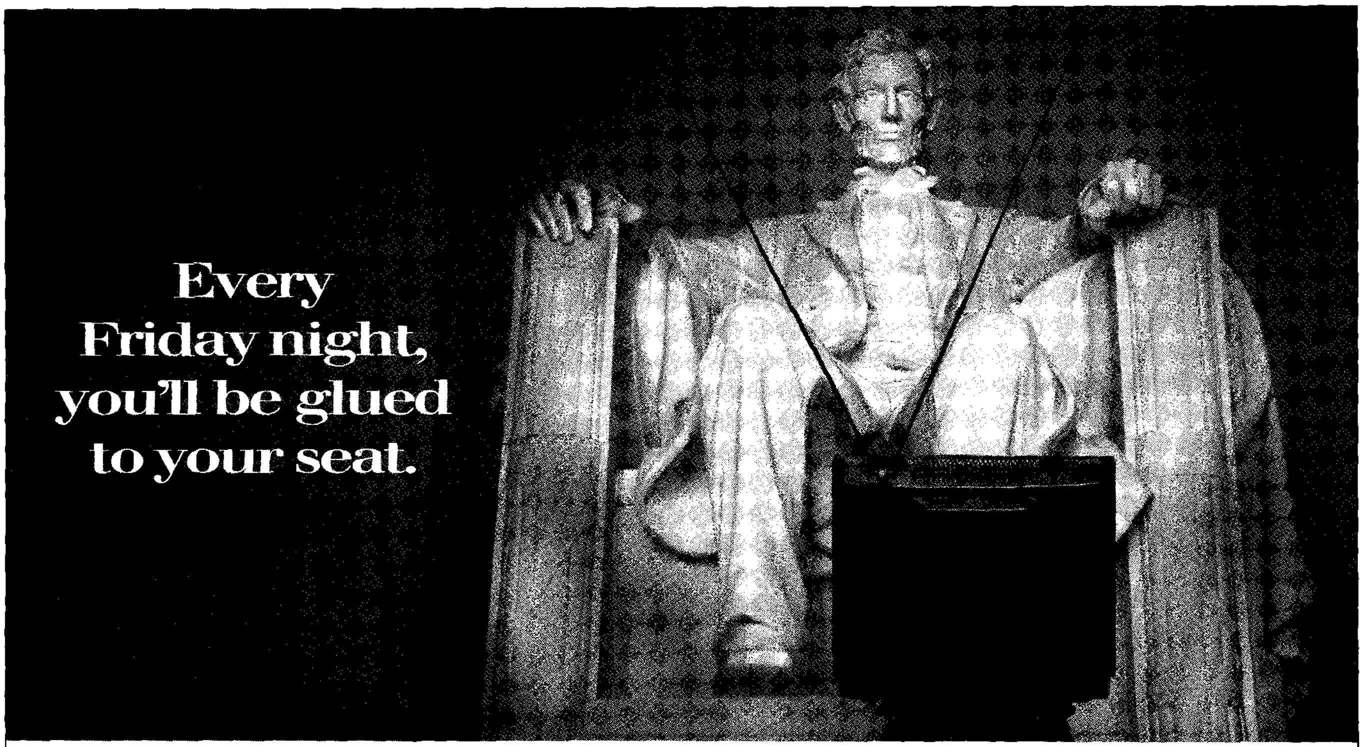
In Munich that night, the people in the audience seemed to be listening with their whole being. Brendel says that performing is a risky business and the concert pianist who wants to make a work new each time he plays it must live dangerously. "As a performer, I have become aware of the paradox of my profession," he said. "You have to be in control and at the same time lose yourself completely. You have to think and feel in advance what you want to do and, simultaneously, to listen to what you *are* doing and react to that. You have to play to satisfy yourself and also play so that the people in the back row will get the message."

Brendel thinks that Beethoven's last piano sonata, Opus 111, is "a premeditated conclusion, a last word leading into silence forever." That evening, the trills with which the sonata ends had never sounded more beautiful or unearthly or final. Perhaps the end was especially poignant because Brendel, like Beethoven, was also saying farewell. His troublesome neck might prevent him from playing the "Hammerklavier" again, so this might be the last time he would perform the complete cycle of Beethoven sonatas in Munich, and a complete cycle, he thinks, has a special impact on the audience. "They grow together and become a group. There's the impression of a journey undertaken together and a goal achieved," he once told me. But there is no simple way of explaining the impact of that extraordinary performance and the depths he seemed to be exploring.

" 'Depth' is an odd word," Isaiah Berlin said. "It's a metaphor, but you can't translate it into other terms. Depth means penetrating into something very basic in oneself, and touching it, and feeling an electric shock."

"One doesn't stop learning," Brendel had said in October, at Plush. "I've learned how to control certain silences. They depend not just on what you play but on how you look. After the last chord of Opus 111, I don't move, I don't take my hands away from the keyboard, because directly I stir they applaud. Each time I play the Beethoven cycle, the silence gets longer, because I know how to relate to it, I know how to sit still."

That night in Munich, Brendel sat still for a very long time, and the applause, when it finally began, was slow to build, as though the audience were coming out from under a spell. Once it got going, however, it seemed that it would never stop. I was sitting at the end of a row, and Reni, who had been a couple of rows behind me, came and crouched by my side as the applause thundered on and on. "I'm glad you heard that," she said. ♦



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LETTER FROM TOKYO

NERVE GAS AND THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS

The trial of a blind Buddhist prophet for the nerve-gas attack in the Tokyo subway is testing a fragile democracy and leaving Japan to wonder how he built his movement among the nation's brightest people.

BY MURRAY SAYLE

THE name Kamikuishiki, which means Upper Nine One Color, sounds quaintly whimsical in Japanese—along the lines of Little Diddleford, say, or some similar village setting for an English detective novel. On a recent visit to Kamikuishiki, I found nothing to explain the odd name; but no one in Japan needs to be told what it is famous for, or why it has become a connoisseurs' tourist attraction. For centuries, it was an obscure hamlet—and would dearly love to be one again—but for a four-year period ending in 1995 it was the headquarters, secret laboratory, and alleged death factory of the doomsday religious cult Aum Shinrikyo (the True Teaching of Aum). There, Aum's charismatic leader, His (self-styled) Holiness Shoko Asahara, readied his Berchtesgaden for the final nuclear battle of light against darkness—an event he forecast to take place late last year.

Asahara is due to go on trial in Tokyo on April 24th, six days after President Clinton concludes a scheduled visit to Japan. The guru is charged with the murders of twenty-five people, including eleven who died in the sarin nerve-gas attack in the Tokyo subway system in March of last year—a terrifying incident that put more than five thousand people in the hospital, and shocked the world with its televised images of choking and vomiting rush-hour riders staggering out of the subway exits. Asahara has proclaimed his innocence, and the Japanese media are predicting the trial of the century, which, given the complexities of the Japanese legal system, it may well outlast. To the despair of Kamikuishiki's residents, their village's instant of fame seems set to go on and on.

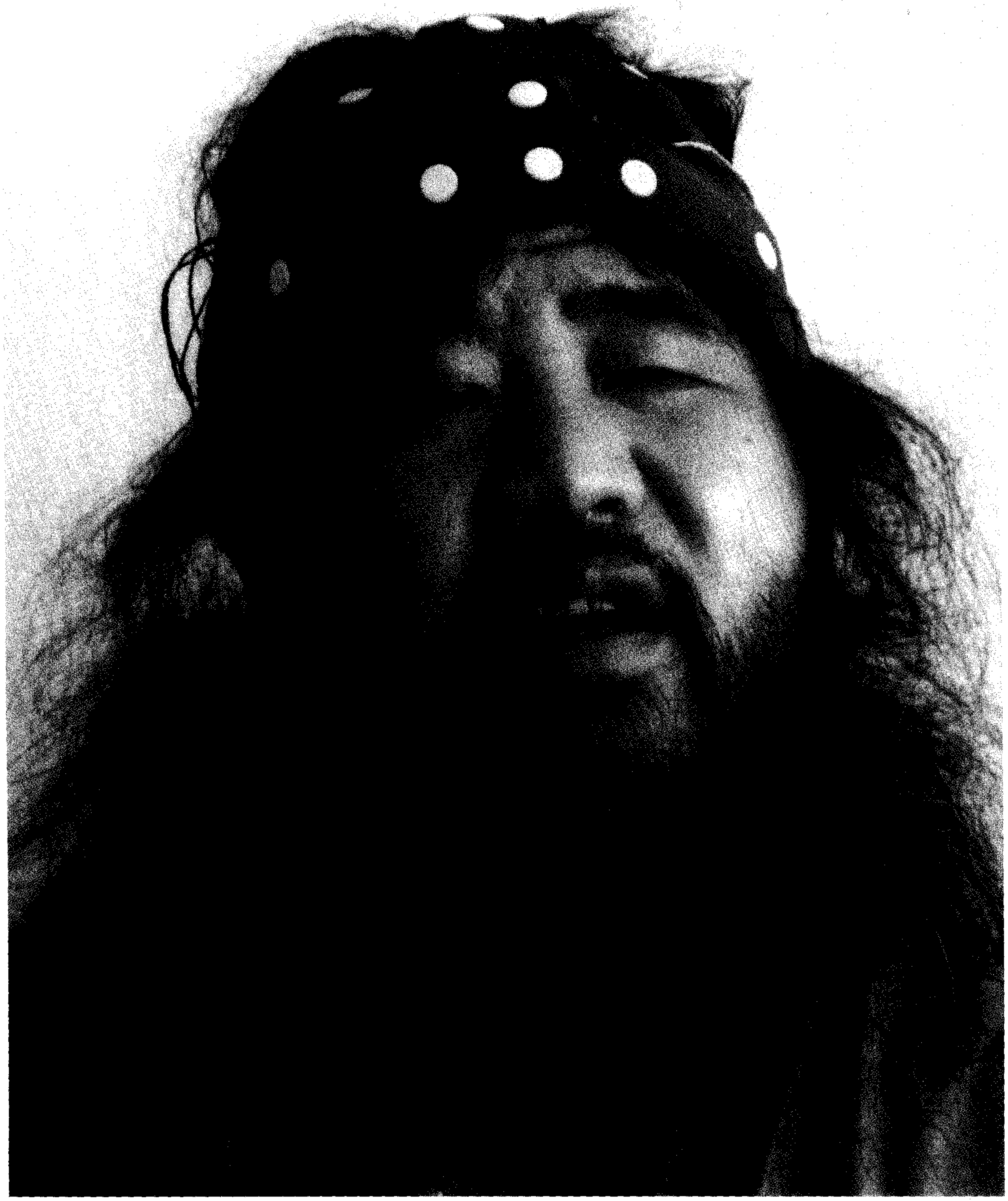
Kamikuishiki sprawls at the lower slopes of Mt. Fuji, seventy miles southwest of Tokyo, on the side of the holy mountain which faces away from the capital. Remote from major traffic arteries, the village is difficult to reach by bus or train. Fuji is no more than a gigantic, shapely pile of cinders, so its slopes are useless for the traditional Japanese crops—rice, tea, and the mulberry trees that feed silkworms. Since ancient times, the area has been a wasteland, and the other side of the mountain is still an artillery and tank range for the Japanese military and for the United States Marines. When Japan adopted the custom of drinking cows' milk, after the Second World War, however, the side that does not get shot at proved ideal for dairy farming. The relatively cheap (by Japanese standards) land, the isolation, Fuji's sacred cone soaring overhead, and uninquisitive neighbors were attractions that persuaded the Aum cult to start buying unconnected plots from Kamikuishiki's farmers—who had no idea what the purchasers had in mind.

A visitor needs help in finding the scattered sites of the extensive Aum operation. This is available at a roadside noodle shop, newly opened for business at the turnoff for Kamikuishiki from the main road. Residents refuse to discuss the cult: they have posted the area with signs reading, in polite but firm Japanese, "We do not want to hear about Aum. You are upsetting our cows. Please go away." But the noodle vender, being neither a local nor a farmer, gladly marks maps, and has even worked up a line in black humor. "Don't get wrapped in Saran," he cheerily calls out to customers paying for their bowls of noodles. (The nerve gas and the food wrap sound similar in Japanese.) With more than two hundred cars arriving every weekend, not to mention endless busloads of camera-toting tourists, Kamikuishiki's first-ever restaurant is, its proprietor told me, doing a brisk business.

The Aum buildings look like parts of a factory complex. The largest, which is three stories high, stands behind rather dilapidated canvas screens that serve to conceal the fact that it was constructed without windows. Visitors are not allowed into most of the complex—all approach roads are blocked, and the police say that the buildings still contain evidence that may be needed. But published photographs show that an enormous Styrofoam relief of Shiva, the Hindu god of destruction and regeneration, which dominates the meditation hall, concealed the door to a hidden chemical laboratory, and that various basements held gas-analyzing devices, machine tools and parts for making automatic weapons, and an industrial-scale microwave oven, which is widely reported to have been used for reducing human bodies to powder—thus disposing of the remains of some thirty people who allegedly died or were murdered within the complex.

Aum's private heliport, hidden in a wood three miles from the main complex, is open to any visitor able to find it. It is surrounded by a twenty-foot-high stockade that is now in a poor state of repair and so is easily penetrated. Inside sits the cult's helicopter, a Soviet-built MI-17. On the day of my visit, I met a pimply, undernourished young man who was wearing a shabby purple windbreaker and a helmet festooned with wires supposedly designed to pick up the brain waves of the guru. (These helmets, which made the many Aum members who wore them look like minor characters in "Ghostbusters," are reported to have cost their pious wearers the equivalent of ten thousand dollars a month to rent.) He

Shoko Asahara (opposite) faces twenty-five murder counts, and dozens of his followers have been indicted.



J. WATANABE/FRIDAY/GAMMA LIAISON

approached me somewhat diffidently and asked whether I had been sent to fly the helicopter (I happen to be Australian but to a hopeful eye could, I suppose, be taken for either a Russian or an American), and he seemed bitterly disappointed to learn that I was not. When I asked the youth why he stayed in the cult, and whether he had heard lately from the guru, who is now being held at Tokyo police headquarters, he said that he knew nothing and had nothing to say.

Apart from the oppressive police presence (I counted six armored buses—transport for a hundred riot police), the tourists, a few bewildered Aum members not under indictment but with nowhere else to go, and the professionally garrulous noodle seller, Kamikuishiki has reverted, at least outwardly, to being a sleepy village. Not far away, the pupils of a hang-gliding school provide a touch of color against the mountainside; horseback riding, hiking, and other rural pastimes unrelated to doom and death have come back. What the prosecutors say went on here seems unreal, a nightmare that fades with the light of day. Once or twice, I had to remind myself that these country roads are, according to

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cult members' confessions, dusted with the ashes of the dead.

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IN *the nineteenth century,* Japanese officials, distributing family names to the common people as part of a modernization program—before then, only the gentry had them—were fond of the name Matsumoto (Foot of the Pine Tree), which is easy to write in simple Sino-Japanese characters, and fills columns in every Japanese telephone book. When, on March 2, 1955, a fourth son was born to a poor family of that name living in a small town on the southern island of Kyushu, his parents gave him an equally plebeian first name, Chizuo. The combination, Chizuo Matsumoto, is reassuringly unpretentious; English speakers can hear much the same folksy tone in Jim Jones. When Chizuo was an infant, his eyesight was damaged by glaucoma, which meant that he could never follow his father into the humble job of making tatami mats. At the age of six, he was sent as a full-time boarder to a prefectural school for the blind. He never lived with his family again.

Many Japanese have speculated about how blind the guru actually is. He has been filmed playing catch with his disciples, and this has led to conjecture that his blindness is a sham; the issue will be prominent at his trial. School records say that he is totally blind in one eye, and has only thirty-per-cent vision in the other. He can read, slowly, with a magnifying glass, and he probably could have attended a regular school, but then his parents would not have received the welfare checks given to help support disabled children. Partly sighted in an all-blind school, the young Matsumoto became a leader. He escorted fellow-pupils to snack shops, for instance, on the condition that they paid for him. He also displayed a vivid imagination, and entertained fantasies about reigning over a kingdom of intelligent robots.

In the Japan of that period, the disabled had a limited choice of occupation; those classified as blind were traditionally trained as masseurs or acupuncturists, whatever their intellectual potential. Nevertheless, in 1973, when Matsumoto was eighteen, he enrolled in a cram school in Tokyo in a bid to enter Tokyo University, the gateway to a political career. But he failed to accomplish a feat all but impossible against fully sighted competitors, and resorted to his predestined trade. Drifting into a fringe world populated by mystics and charlatans, who exploited a combination of the Chinese techniques of acupuncture and herbal medicine with fortune-telling and the occult, he opened his own shop near Tokyo. Around this time, the down-home, short-haired Chizuo Matsumoto became the bearded, flowing-maned Shoko (a homonym for the word meaning "an offering of incense") Asahara (an uncommon family name that, to Japanese ears, has much of the tony ring of its literal English translation, Linfield).

Asahara began developing a winning personality that was to bring him tens of thousands of adoring followers. He is short, with a tendency toward plumpness. Near-blindness gives him the vulnerability, and the quiet authority, of helplessness. He is normally affable in manner, was often seen (until he was indicted for mass murder) smiling and joking, and is described by old associates, especially women, as "cuddly"—a quality not possessed by many masculinity-obsessed Japanese men. Those who knew him as a herbalist say that he "understood human problems" and "was a good listener"—qualities that brought converts to his cult and, in time, made the subsequent confessions all the more appalling.

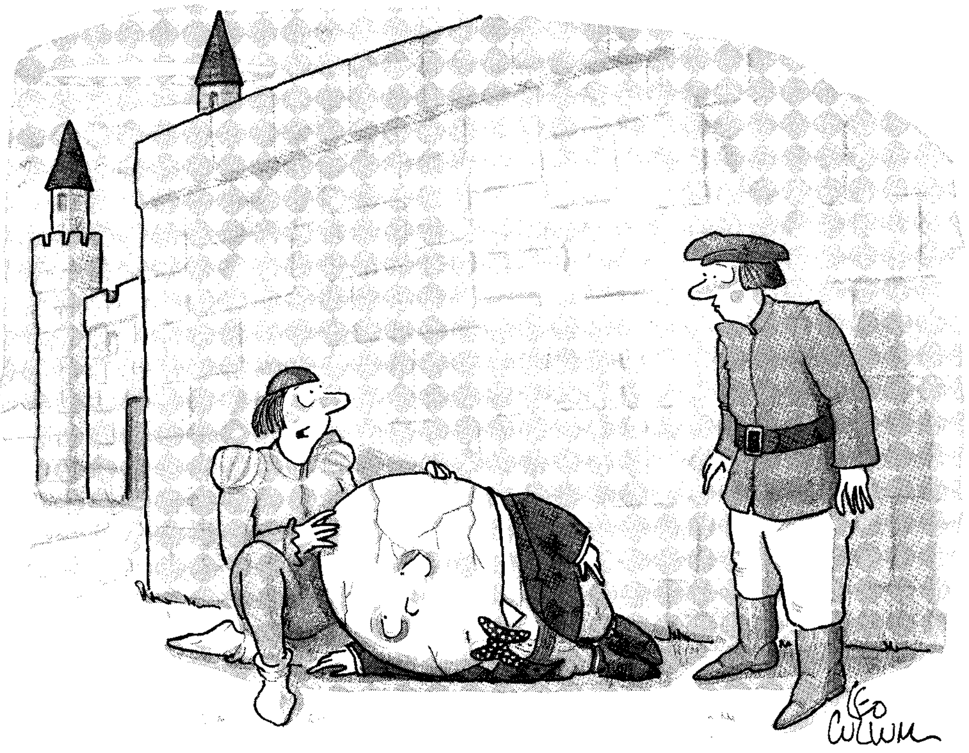
In 1982, Asahara was investigated for selling a worthless infusion of orange peel, an offense that resulted in the revocation of his herbalist's license. He told a woman assistant, "I believe that the future lies in religion." Forced to close down his shop, Asahara left for India, in search of enlightenment. By his own account, he attained it in the Himalayas sometime around 1984, when he was twenty-nine. The Japanese media have reported that, during the same period, a long-haired, bearded young man of Oriental appearance was forcibly removed by guards from an enclosure in India where he was trying to have his photograph taken beside the sacred fig tree under which the Buddha himself achieved enlightenment, in 528 B.C., at the age of thirty-five. Asahara returned to Japan and founded a small publishing house and a yoga and meditation circle with half a dozen followers, who met in a rented room. He called his group the New Society of Aum—the word "Aum" (more commonly rendered in English as "Om") being a Sanskrit mantra that represents the three major Hindu gods, Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva—later changing the name to Aum Shinrikyo, the True Teaching of Aum. Guru Asahara's breakthrough into the paranormal big time came in late 1985, when the Japanese occult magazine *Twilight Zone* ran a photograph of him meditating in the lotus position while apparently floating in midair.

One of his earliest followers, a former insurance-company employee, turned out to have a head for business, and the guru himself, who was in theory above worldly matters, also showed a keen interest in commerce. In August of 1989, after much rowdy agitation by his followers, Aum Shinrikyo was recognized as a religious corporation by the Tokyo Metropolitan Government—a move that conferred upon it tax exemptions or tax reductions in a number of business enterprises. Within a year and a half, Aum, financed by gifts from followers of as much as half a million dollars each, owned and operated an empire of labor-intensive, low-startup-cost businesses: computer retail outlets, noodle shops, health clubs, a telephone dating club, and, incredibly, a babysitting service.

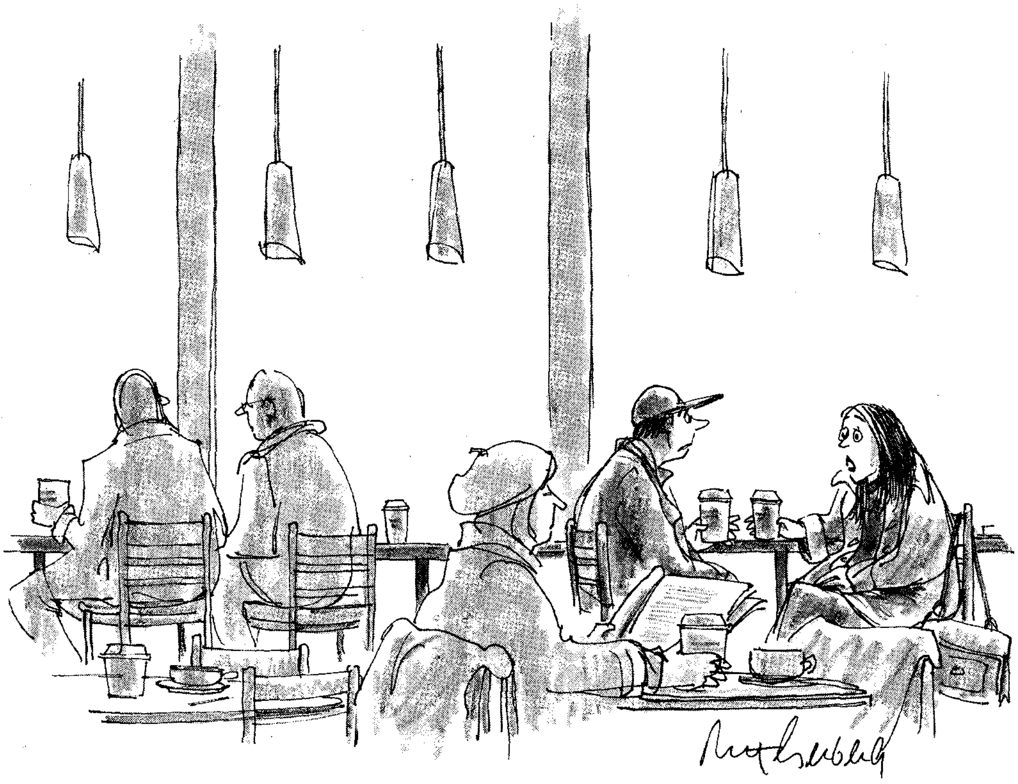
WHO staffed these lucrative enterprises? Mostly, enthusiastic young volunteers from Aum-run communes that opened all over Japan. Changes in Japanese society had given the guru a source of cheap, endlessly renewable, highly motivated labor. The conflict between generations is a worldwide phenomenon, and Japan is no exception. The generation of Asahara's parents had never known anything but drudgery, war, defeat, hunger, and more drudgery, but by the nineteen-seventies Japan had become a great economic power, with the basics of life guaranteed to all. A number of young Japanese began to view the standard means of establishing security—namely, signing on for lifetime employment with some stuffy company; living with your out-of-touch parents until marriage, often arranged; and mortgaging your own and your children's futures to pay off a huge loan on a tiny "rabbit hutch" house—as a kind of death-in-life. With a slowing economy, low starting wages, and some of the world's highest rents, it is still all but impossible for young Japanese to move away from home, much less try out various life styles in search of self-fulfillment.

Asahara offered these restless youngsters not only jobs but also a Japanese variation on the nineteen-sixties' innovation of discontented American youth: communal living. The Aum members were overwhelmingly young; many of the leaders joined when they were in their late teens or early twenties. Their retreats were decorated with Indian motifs, which were fashionable among young Japanese, and buildings were given Sanskrit names. One former convert summarized his initial impression of Aum as "curry and yoga." Aum dropouts as well as those members who retain their Aum faith describe life in the communes as resembling an Asian version of Woodstock, complete with music, dancing, drugs (mostly LSD, which the police say Aum clandestinely manufactured to brighten up its meditation sessions), and endless, drowsy late-night speculation about the meaning of life.

Traditionally in Japan, such speculation has been regarded as the province of the aged. But television, which was first seen in 1953, two years before Asahara was born, broke the bonds of centuries. Japanese TV, like TV in the West, mostly features a youthful world in which age and parental authority are not respected. Japanese TV stars are young, and are replaced by new talent every few years. Many find fame in the science-fiction serials that, to the despair of parents, clog early-evening TV and remain popular with the young adults raised on them. Descended from the venerable lizard Godzilla, these serials, as Professor Helen Hardacre, of Harvard, writes, draw on a set of stock characters and situations: an evil power from outer space, whose aim is to subjugate all humanity, using ordinary people who have been turned into robots by drugs (the mind-altering, not the mind-expanding, kind), telepathy, and perverted science; and, opposing this monster, the always young "warriors of truth." The action is mostly special-effects combat involving laser beams, plasma rays, and the like. The warriors of truth, who sound a lot like Japanese teen-agers, submit unconditionally to the will of a leader of superhuman courage. Obedience to his orders is the only justification needed for action, however violent; compromise or the peaceful resolution of conflict is never considered. The killing goes on, at the leader's command, until the *warui yatsu*, the bad guys, are dead. Shin'ichi Ichikawa, one of Japan's leading creators



"He's in an H.M.O. Get some of the King's horses and a few of the King's men."



"It's no use, Marc. There've already been too many decaf cappuccinos between us."

of science fiction, has publicly admitted that, to his deep regret, he sees much evidence of the influence of TV serials, his own included, on the infantile, black-and-white moral universe of Aum Shinrikyo.

RECRUITING for Aum was conducted by the young, of the young, with much youthful exuberance. Cheerful followers in white robes would stand at subway exits handing out invitations to free yoga sessions. Those who attended the sessions were given pamphlets on meditation, correct breathing, and similar nonlethal topics. Prospective converts saw the guru mostly on TV screens—not on the commercial channels but in training films shown in the communes. Live-action footage depicted the guru apparently performing miracles like levitation, while animated films showed him flying through cities and passing through walls. Other footage showed Aum rites: young adherents of both sexes—clad in white satin and wearing, with a very Japanese sensitivity to status, colored sashes indicating religious rank—approaching the tubby guru, resplendent in see-through golden silk robes, prostrating themselves, and reverently kissing his toe.

Some followers in their late teens were simply having a good time among people of their own age, away from parental supervision, while the guru floated, godlike, far above in a heavenly TV world. Like other deceptively easy-to-join cults, however, Aum had an unpleasant fate in store for those who tried to leave: they were told that they would burn in a Buddhist Hell. Rescuing backsliders, some cult members have confessed, turned into kidnapping them, and, as that went unpunished by the law, kidnapping turned into murder. Yoshihiro Inoue, who is expected to be a key witness against Asahara, told the Tokyo district court that he had taken part in the subway gassing but was pleading not guilty, on the ground that he had been following orders, and would have been killed if he had disobeyed. Inoue, who was twenty-five years old at the time of the attack, joined the cult in high school and had no experience of adult life before Aum.

Slightly older members, however, had real intellectual achievements, predominantly in the sciences, before they joined Aum. The fact that they did join it—and that some still believe in the guru—has caused much soul-searching among thoughtful Japanese. "How did we fail them?" an educator wailed at a recent conference of the Japan Teachers' Union. Shinnosuke Sakamoto, a typical member of the older group, who is now thirty-two, described his enlightenment to the Associated Press last May. A candidate for a doctorate in anthropology at Tokyo University, the pinnacle of the Japanese scholastic system, Sakamoto had become interested in Aum as a possible subject for his dissertation. Hearing Asahara on tape at a cult training center, he was impressed. "I admire the supreme master," he said. "He tells us things nobody else could explain so clearly and logically." The young anthropologist made a ten-day pilgrimage to Kamikuishiki, where he was sent to meditate in a small, dark cell, scores of which honeycomb the Aum complex. After twelve fearful hours alone, Sakamoto said, he saw a vision of his research papers being tossed into the air and scattered to the winds. His academic aspirations, he realized, were causing his spiritual pain. Giving up ambition, "I felt as if I had ascended to a higher stage," he told the A.P. "A bright light fell from above and entered me." Sakamoto defended both the cult's pharmacopoeia ("What's wrong with having such a wonderful experience with the help of drugs?") and its kidnapping of disaffected followers. Aum, he said, was only trying to help the confused who had lost their way. Even after the subway gas attack and Asahara's arrest, Sakamoto still believed in him.

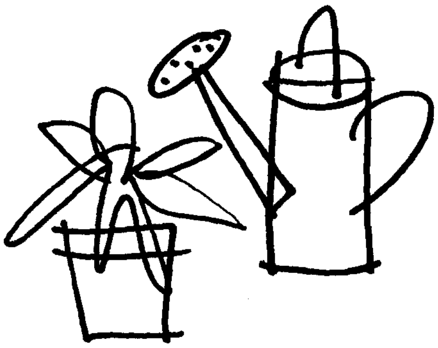
But Sakamoto was not admitted to the guru's inner circle, so he knew nothing about its members' apparent involvement with weapons and nerve gas. Upon attaining successive levels of enlightenment, Aum believers, particularly those with property, administrative skills, or qualifications in the "hard" physical sciences, were encouraged to seek ordination. This required taking vows of chastity; cutting all ties with the world; renouncing families; and signing over worldly possessions to the cult, including real estate, savings, clothes, telephone calling cards, and personal seals. Such seals are the Japanese equivalent of signatures, and possession of them enabled Aum to operate the bank accounts of ordained members, who were also asked to do what they could to turn over family property.

In 1989, when Aum was recognized as a religious body, it claimed four thousand members, of whom three hundred and eighty were ordained. Six years later, in a report on Aum's terrorist activities, the United States Senate's permanent subcommittee on investigations estimated the cult's worldwide following at fifty thousand and its global assets, in real estate and in shares and other securities, at more than a billion dollars. Aum USA Company, Ltd., which had been incorporated in New York City in 1987, attracted only a few converts, mostly of Japanese origin. Aum's activities in the United States were confined largely to making high-tech purchases. Asahara had similarly poor success in other countries, but some thirty thousand joined in Russia—a nation of disintegrating moral values, unfocussed religious longings, and weak law enforcement.

THE secretive yet high-profile faith was spotted early by the Japanese media. On October 2, 1989, the *Sunday Mainichi*, one of Japan's biggest-selling magazines, began a series of articles on the cult—entitled "Give Back My Child!"—by interviewing six families who charged that Asahara had stolen their children. By this, they meant that the children, who were actually in their late teens or older, had joined the cult without parental permission and had cut ties with their families. According to Helen Hardacre, the cult responded by blocking the street outside the home of the magazine's editor, Taro Maki; placarding his neighborhood with posters accusing him of sacrilege; and posting similar leaflets in the toilets of the magazine's offices, thereby inviting the (probably correct) inference that an Aum mole had penetrated the staff. A series of confrontations on TV between the magazine's executives, along with other media figures, and members of the Aum hierarchy followed. The Aum representatives turned out to be young, good-looking, eloquent, and well educated (two of them were lawyers). Many viewers saw the debates as yet another conflict of the generations, and the publicity brought Aum a flood of new recruits. Later, it was reported that Asahara had considered but then thought better of plans to kill Maki and blow up the magazine's building.

The parents, however, were not about to give up. They formed an organization, Concerned Parents of Aum Children, and were helped by a group of lawyers, including a crusading young Yokohama attorney named Tsutsumi Sakamoto (no relation to the converted anthropologist), who had prominently represented labor activists dismissed by the national railways. The parents planned to bring suit against the cult to produce their children and return assets that they said had been acquired by coerced "donations." The lawyers' team collected numerous statements on the religious and business practices of Aum, which they intended to bring before the Japanese courts. After a Tokyo TV station taped a blistering interview with Tsutsumi Sakamoto, the station was visited by an Aum delegation. The delegation next visited Sakamoto at his office to persuade him to apologize for his remarks in the TV interview. He refused, and said that, far from withdrawing them, he would fight Aum all the harder. The lawyer's doggedness threatened the guru's rapidly expanding plans.

Four days later, on November 4, 1989, Sakamoto, his wife, and their year-old son disappeared. Friends found their apartment in disarray, and an Aum lapel badge on the floor. Last September, the police, acting on a confession from a former Aum member, found the Sakamotos' remains buried in three makeshift mountain graves, far from Yokohama. A six-man Aum hit team, according to the confession, had entered the lawyer's apartment shortly before dawn, killed the sleeping family, wrapped their bodies in futons, and removed them under cover of darkness. Tomomasa Nakagawa, who went on trial last month, has pleaded guilty to the lawyer's murder. According to his confession, the team strangled Sakamoto and his wife, and smothered their baby. Nakagawa said that Asahara had personally ordered the lawyer killed. Prosecutors also learned that Asahara had warned the members of the hit team that they would hang if their deed was discovered. Asahara has been charged in these murders, the first in a long series that have been attributed to the cult, and all of which he has denied.



Despite the obvious motive and the physical evidence pointing directly to Aum, the Japanese police did not at the time seek warrants to raid the cult's facilities, or to question Asahara. The reason for this official reticence, later bitterly criticized, lies in the reaction—many now call it overreaction—against Japan's long history of religious persecution, which, as in Europe, extended well into modern times. For three centuries, Christians, branded as Western spies, were hunted down and killed, sometimes by crucifixion. Then, in the tide of ultranationalism that culminated in the Second World War, Buddhism was, in turn, denounced as "foreign" (after fourteen hundred years in Japan), and even adherents of some versions of the Japanese folk religion Shinto were persecuted, in order to favor State Shinto, the compulsory cult of the Emperor and his divine ancestors. Buddhism, like Christianity, might well have been forced underground were it not for the fact that Shinto viewed dead bodies as polluting, and so had no rite for burying its faithful. As a result, Japanese Buddhism largely became centered on the immensely profitable funeral business. (Wealthy Buddhist temples are still widely preyed on by the infamous *yakuza* crime syndicates.) After Japan's defeat, State Shinto was suppressed by the American occupation, and traditional Shinto contracted (at least, in the small village where I live, which is reasonably representative) into a colorful set of folkloric superstitions, with many festivals but no discernible spiritual or pastoral role.

ONE result of this religious decline was a void in the lives of many Japanese—a void that the occupation authorities who drafted Japan's postwar constitution unwittingly helped to deepen. Article 20 guarantees freedom of religion, and forbids state involvement in any "religious activity." To Americans, this sounds like no more than a fundamental human right. But the Japanese and, in particular, the Japanese police have read Article 20 and the accompanying Religious Corporation Law as prohibitions on examining the practices of any religion, or even entering religious buildings without solid evidence of illegal activities. Although the state may not meddle in religion, Japanese religious corporations are free to intervene in politics, to finance candidates, and even to set up political parties—things that their American counterparts cannot do without losing their privileged tax status. Far from being seen as a potential menace to a still immature democracy, Japan's religious free-for-all, before Aum, was praised as proof of the country's good health.

The spiritual void and the climate of privilege and protection have made for an explosion of new Japanese religions and the vigorous revival of many prewar "new" religions (among them Christianity) that had managed to survive the centuries of persecution. By 1993, Japan had 231,019 registered religious sects, claiming a combined membership of two hundred million. This is seventy million more than the population of the archipelago, a discrepancy that reflects the fact that Japanese freely adopt new religions in order to pass exams, to find marriage partners, or to improve their luck in business, and that mainstream Buddhism and Shinto allow multiple religious memberships. At first, there was little to distinguish Aum from rival sects, or its guru (apart from his blindness) from scores of self-acclaimed "perfect masters."

Japan plays host to various intelligence organizations—its own and those of the United States and other countries—that are still set in their Cold War ways. Out of habit, the Americans track leftist political groups, while the Japanese keep an eye on right-wing nationalists as well. Until too late, it was nobody's business, apart from the nervous media's, to discover what Aum actually taught, or what went on in the communes. As an intelligence officer told the Senate inquiry in Washington last fall, "They simply were not on anybody's radar screens," even though there were American military installations close to Aum facilities, including the Kamikuishiki headquarters.

Within weeks of the Sakamoto family's disappearance and its harvest of publicity, Aum launched a campaign for the Japanese general elections of February, 1990, with its own party, Truth. Twenty-five Aum candidates ran, headed by Asahara. Their electioneering, widely covered by the Japanese media, featured white-robed young followers wearing smiling masks of the guru's face, and dancing and chanting "Sho-ko, Sho-ko, A-sa-ha-ra!" No coherent reason why anyone should vote for the Truth Party was ever given. Its most eloquent candidate was not the guru but his best-known spokesman, Fumihiro Joyu, who, in his mid-twenties, had boy-next-door good looks, natty suits, a master's degree in artificial intelligence, and fluency in English, and who has now been indicted on perjury and forgery charges. In the campaign, Joyu became the cult's official public voice, skillfully deflecting questions put by less mentally agile interviewers. Asahara made television appearances in which he denied that the cult was connected to the Sakamotos' disappearance, and he implied that the damning lapel badge had been planted by a rival sect. But it was Joyu who charmed television viewers—especially young women—with the disarming claim that Aum beliefs had given him the strength to stop masturbating. (Even after the Tokyo subway gas attack, Joyu was still being showered with mash notes, flowers, and undergarments.)

For Asahara and his inner circle, the 1990 election was a shock. Asahara himself did not get as many votes as Joyu, collecting fewer than eighteen hundred votes in a district of five thousand. Attempting to regroup, Asahara led a thousand disciples to a remote island in the Okinawa prefecture (a rehearsal, it later emerged, for the evacuation of Aum followers from the main Japanese islands before an American nuclear attack), but the media tracked them down, grilled them on whether they planned to commit mass suicide, and, in a circus atmosphere, forced Asahara to call off his retreat. Towns and villages began to contest every attempt of the cult to buy land and set up communes, and were rigorously countersued by Aum. (The cult eventually received almost ten million dollars to leave the people of Namino, a small village on Kyushu, Asahara's home island, in peace.) Despite abundant funds, publicity, and immunity from police interference, Asahara's path to political power was blocked. Violence, as Hannah Arendt said, is an expression

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DOWN THE RUNWAY

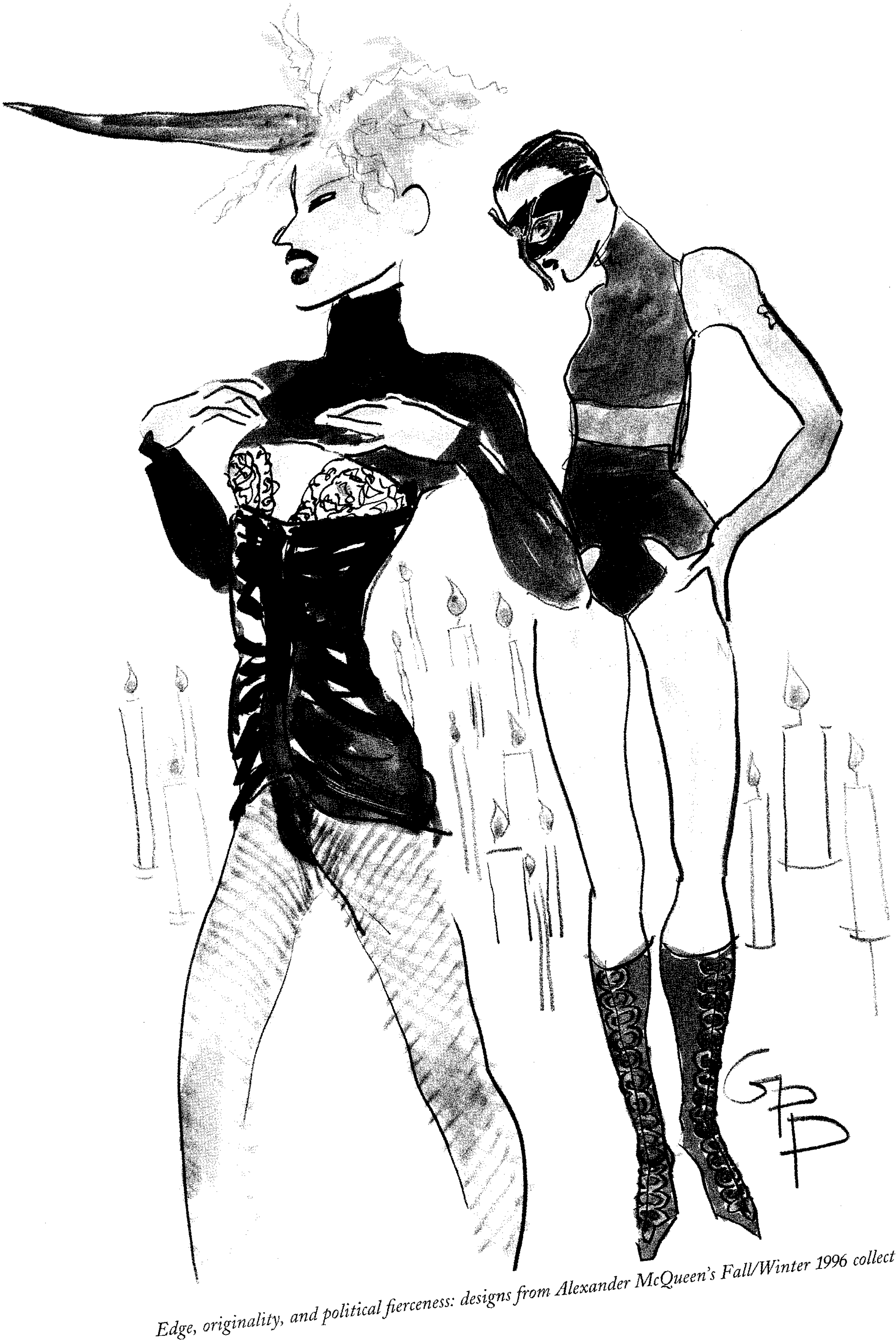
ARTFUL DODGER

"THOSE fashion editors in the front row are going to have to hold on to their black shades," Alexander McQueen jokes, when asked about the spectacle he'll be putting on in a deconsecrated Lower East Side synagogue this week. The twenty-seven-year-old British designer has been widely hailed by fashion scouts who yearn for edge and originality. By others, his work has been criticized for being too wild and too graphic—as when he presented a collection of ravaged-looking designs last year and titled the show, with typical political fierceness, "Highland Rape." His New York show, McQueen says, will be a bigger, more aggressive version of the extravaganza he presented a few weeks ago in London, at Christ Church in Spitalfields, where his theme was the wars that have been fought in the name of religious faith. What's remarkable is that his designs succeed both in incorporating such ideas and as energetic, innovatively crafted fashion.

McQueen was the youngest of six kids who grew up in a working-class family in East London. He describes himself as "the faggot in the family who was drawing frocks since I was three years old." At sixteen, he pushed his way into a tailoring job with Anderson & Sheppard, on Savile Row. Even in that upper-crust environment he managed to sneak in a bit of McQueen wickedness: when he was bored, he would scrawl unprintable graffiti on the canvas that went into the lining of jackets for clients like the Prince of Wales. A few years later, after he did stints at a London theatrical-costume shop and in the workrooms of several designers, he struck out on his own.

McQueen's most notorious articles of clothing are pants called bumsters: they lower the waistline, make people look taller, and reveal rear cleavage. But fame doesn't mean he thinks he has cracked the fashion establishment. "I can't see Anna Wintour in a pair of bumsters," he says. —INGRID SISCHY

DRAWING BY
GLADYS PERINT PALMER



Edge, originality, and political fierceness: designs from Alexander McQueen's Fall/Winter 1996 collection.

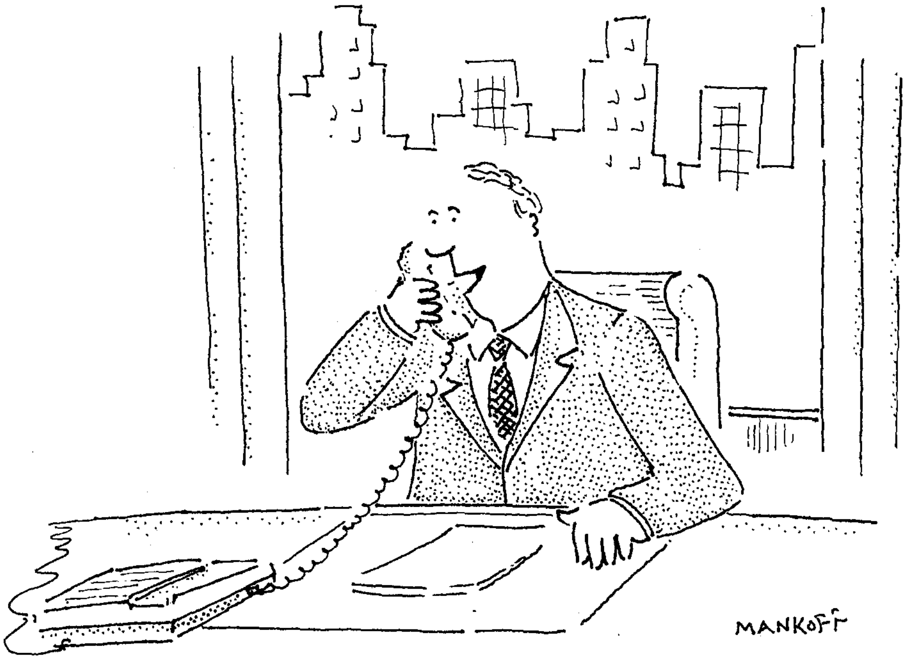
of impotence. In retrospect, it is easy enough to follow the guru's conversion from prayer to nerve gas as the working of a frustrated, self-obsessed mind.

Many Aum defectors have reported that, before the electoral fiasco, Asahara believed that first Japan and then the whole world would acclaim him as the new Buddha and the savior of humanity. Even as a child, he believed that he was destined to be a leader, and his childhood ambition had been political, not religious. But Tokyo University, which he saw as the path to power, had rejected him. Now the Japanese voters had also spurned him. During this period, he began to expound on Christian and Jewish prophecies of the approaching Armageddon, persuading himself and his small entourage of trusted lieutenants (but not, at first, the majority of Aum's followers) that world war was imminent and that to survive it Aum had to be armed for self-defense. The would-be politician and his aides apparently began a secret worldwide search for cheap, easily made weapons of mass destruction, with the aim of waging war—at first, probably, defensively—against Japan, America, and the rest of humanity. Their war, he predicted, would end in victory for Aum's version of the gentle face of Buddhism.

WHEN the handsome, wealthy young Prince Gautama set out, some twenty-five hundred years ago, to wander as a beggar through northern India searching for a remedy for the pain of being alive, it is safe to say he was not thinking of nerve gas, plague bacillus, laser guns, or any such modern scientific horrors, much less of using them on innocent victims. Although Asahara incorported big chunks of both Christian and Jewish teaching into his message, Aum's ideas, its language, and many of its practices are unmistakably Buddhist, and thus seemed familiar and unthreatening to most Japanese. The guru himself may be a "charismatic madman," as the Senate subcommittee called him, but his closest disciples were sane, bright, and well educated; and they thought they were following Gautama Buddha, even as they killed. This paradox calls for an explanation.

In his search for the secret of suffering, the Buddha (his title means "the enlightened") fearlessly practiced the mortification of the flesh, starving and ill-treating himself. Tempted one evening by Mara, the Evil One, with what amounted to a square meal, dancing girls, and worldly renown, Prince Gautama continued to meditate, finally grasping, as dawn broke, the Four Noble Truths: (1) all human life is suffering; (2) suffering comes from desire, which leads to endless rebirth, and so to more suffering; (3) by eliminating desire, we can end suffering; and (4) enlightenment, the end of suffering, can be achieved by following the Eightfold Noble Path, which, simplified, means finding the middle way between excessive self-indulgence and oversevere self-punishment. Buddhism has at least as many sects and schisms as Christianity, but all agree that the Four Noble Truths, rightly understood, lead the believer to Nirvana—to perfect knowledge and the escape from rebirth and the relentless Wheel of Life.

Some of the practices of Aum have thus, at least, a resemblance to traditional Buddhism. Seekers of enlightenment could have been following the Buddha in giving up their worldly possessions and, as charity for the poor is not strongly emphasized by Buddhism, in consecrating them to the faith (i.e., turning them over to Asahara). When police in gas masks finally broke into the Kamikuishiki complex, last year, some fifty of its inhabitants were emaciated to the point of having to be carried out on stretchers, presumably as a result of trying to live on "Aum stew," a watery gruel made of cheap vegetables. Aum's rule of chastity and the separation of husbands, wives, and children have Buddhist precedents. (Asahara made exceptions for himself: he lived comfortably with his wife—an adoring disciple, who is now in prison, indicted for conspiracy to murder—and their six children, most of whom are now in the care of relatives. Being perfectly enlightened, he had arguably risen above worldly desire; nevertheless, he enjoyed steak, and steadily put on weight in his glory years.) Various hypnotic drugs, LSD, and the so-called "truth" drug sodium thiopental were used in Aum rites and initiations and reportedly before interrogations—but mind-altering substances have a long history of religious use. The thirty or so deaths or suspected deaths among Aum followers were not altogether surprising in a closed community of all ages and states of health, and whose members were, voluntarily and otherwise, subjected to severe privations. Among the most ambitious Aum followers—the candidates for enlightenment who were lowered into scalding baths, hung upside down, and subjected to various other tortures, all in pursuit of the higher stages of perfect truth—some, statistically speaking, were bound to die. ("Treatment" in Aum-run "hospitals" by the eight qualified physicians among the four hundred or so Aum followers who have been arrested may, if anything, have increased the death toll.)



"Great! Let's have sex—I mean, let's do business."

"Anyone here a 'worthless, no-good drunken bum'?"

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Even the apparently deliberate killings—like the deaths of three followers who, according to the indictments, were strangled on Asahara's orders for disobedience—have some sanction among the wilder reaches of apocalyptic Buddhism. Certain strands of Tantric, or Vajrayana (translated as Thunderbolt or Diamond Vehicle), Buddhism hold that the killing of those who do evil, or might do evil, can be a kind of benign euthanasia, releasing them from their bad karma and, at the same time, increasing the spiritual merit of those who kill for the sake of the Truth. Asahara reportedly used a Tibetan religious term, *poa*, which he said meant "sent to Shiva," when ordering these and many other killings—those of the attorney Sakamoto and his family, for instance. The doctrine of *poa* has been cited to explain the impassive attitude of many Aum followers arrested after the subway gas attack, who seemed unaware that they might have done anything wrong.

Mainstream Buddhists have denounced these teachings as grotesque perversions of their faith. A Tibetan Buddhist scholar in Japan, Professor Pema Gyalpo, says that *poa* is the act of sending the spirit of a person on his deathbed to the Pure Land, and has no homicidal overtones. And the Dalai Lama, with whom Asahara had himself photographed, has dissociated himself from Aum, saying that it is "absolutely wrong" for a religion to take up arms, even in self-defense.

IN 1992, Asahara published a book, "Declaring Myself the Christ," in which he did indeed announce that he was Jesus. This allowed him to add, to Aum's mainly Buddhist doctrines, the Judeo-Christian concept of the Last Judgment and the final battle of Armageddon. The scheduling of Armageddon enabled the guru to append a fashionable millennial urgency to Buddhism's timeless world view. And, according to one reading of Nostradamus, who was also embraced by Aum's expanding Buddhism, war with Mongols is to break out in July, 1999—a forecast that, by coincidence, fitted neatly into Asahara's vision of approaching doom. The guru's claim to be Jesus helped him to explain Aum's bad publicity and his own rebuff at the polls by quoting Matthew 24:9: "Then shall they deliver you up to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake."

Asahara's book proclaimed him to be not only Japan's only fully enlightened master but also the Lamb of God, sent to take away the sins of the world. In giving his disciples his own spiritual power, the guru said, he was taking unto himself their burdens of sin and bad karma (and, a skeptic might add, their worldly goods). As a result, he said he was growing steadily weaker, was suffering from several ailments, including liver cancer, and was soon to die. He expected, however, to be still on earth when a vast shadowy power, identified variously as Japan, the United States, and a conspiracy of Jews, Freemasons, and rival Japanese religions, launched the Third World War. (Japan has two thousand five hundred and twelve Freemasons, almost all of them foreigners, and fewer than a thousand Jews.) Mt. Fuji might erupt, Tokyo would be attacked with gas and nuclear weapons, and the world would probably end. A small part of humanity might survive, Asahara predicted—but only if Aum had thirty thousand fully enlightened disciples ready to spread his message of salvation. This vision led, in the spring of 1992, to rapid action: a worldwide, lavishly funded drive for converts, especially for those with scientific knowledge, and, according to prosecutors, secret experiments with gas and biological weapons.

The cult's first, and most successful, theatre of its new missionary and military activity was the former Soviet Union, which, conveniently, happens to be an impoverished, everything-must-go arms bazaar. Aum opened its first office in Moscow in 1991, and in March of 1992, according to Aum documents, Asahara visited Russia and sought out the Nobel Prize-winning physicist Nikolay Basov—who had developed practical uses for lasers—apparently to tap his knowledge for a planned weapons system. Three months later, according to the Senate report, which documents the cult's activities in Russia, Aum was officially recognized as a religious organization. Not long afterward, it began buying time on a Moscow radio station, and broadcasting the cult's message to Japan and East Asia via a powerful transmitter near

Vladivostok. Aum Russia, as it was called, claimed ninety thousand ordained and lay members (thirty thousand is a more accurate estimate), before it was disbanded by government decree after the Tokyo gassings. Asahara's image as reproduced in Russian-language pamphlets was not that of a portly, robed Asian clergyman but that of a stripped, beaten Christ wearing a crown of thorns and hanging from a cross—and also bearing a striking resemblance to the prophet-monk Grigory Rasputin.

Even before Aum was officially recognized by the Russian Justice Ministry, Kiyohide Hayakawa, an architecture graduate of Osaka University and, according to Aum documents, the cult's chief arms-buying agent, had made the first of many visits to munitions factories and research laboratories in remote parts of the country. (Aum's MI-17 helicopter was built in Tatarstan, and was transported to Japan by Azerbaijan Air; a Japanese parliamentary report notes that a Russian legislator from the Caucasus was investigated on suspicion of accepting a bribe in connection with the deal.) Oleg Lobov, the secretary of the Russian Security Council, who, according to the Russian newspaper *Izvestia*, sought investors for a mysterious institution known as the Russian-Japanese University, has, since the gas attack, denied close links to the cult, and said that he thought he was aiding a charity. According to Russian press reports, Aum paid him millions of dollars for his philanthropic and other efforts.

In September of 1992, Aum purchased a machine factory in Ishikawa Prefecture. Most of the workers quickly resigned, and the company went bankrupt. The police say that Aum deliberately shut the company down and then used its machine tools to make parts for Soviet-designed AK-74 assault rifles, which the cult was preparing to assemble at Kamikuishiki. Early in 1993, the first of Aum's chain of shops selling discount computers opened in Tokyo. Shortly afterward, Asahara, in a sermon preached at Sendai, in northeastern Japan, called on his followers to confront the Japanese state, which he said was trying to control him and was making him ill, sometimes with poison gas.

Soon, however, he had recovered, at least enough to travel. In September, 1993, Aum bought Banjawarn Station, a sheep ranch in Western Australia, for half a million dollars, and Asahara and twenty-four followers visited the new property. The Australian police say that the Aum group flew into Perth airport from Tokyo, and paid some fifteen thousand dollars in customs duties and thirty thousand dollars in excess baggage, which included mechanical ditchdiggers, generators, gas masks, protective clothing, and various acids labelled "hand soap." Two members of the party—a biochemist and a physician—were detained and charged with carrying dangerous goods on an aircraft. They paid two thousand four hundred Australian dollars in fines and were then allowed to proceed to Banjawarn. Asahara and most of his group departed, and by early October all had left Australia. After the puzzling incident at Perth airport, the Federal Police telephoned their opposite numbers in Tokyo, and were told that Aum was under investigation on allegations that members trying to leave the cult had been kidnapped and held against their will. (The evidence linking Aum to the disappearance of the Sakamoto family was not mentioned.) Asahara and the others were refused visas to return to Australia, and the ranch was sold.

SURFACES

Surfaces serve
their own purposes,
strive to remain
constant (all lives
want that). There is
a skin, not just on
peaches but on oceans
(note the telltale
slough of foam on beaches).
Sometimes it's loose,
as in the case
of cats: you feel how a
second life slides
under it. Sometimes it
fits. Take glass.
Sometimes it outlasts
its underside. Take reefs.
The private lives of surfaces
are innocent, not devious.
Take the one-dimensional
belief of enamel in itself,
the furious autonomy
of lustre (crush a pearl—
it's powder), the whole
curious seamlessness
of how we're each surrounded
and what it doesn't teach.

—Kay Ryan

There has been much discussion concerning the purpose of Aum's Australian expedition. The cult took out mining-exploration licenses, and there are uranium deposits in the area, but refining the ore to weapons-grade quality was beyond even Aum's scientific resources. Prosecutors say that the manufacture of sarin, a nerve gas developed from an insecticide in Germany before the Second World War but never used, had already begun on a laboratory scale at Kamikuishiki. The formula for sarin is in many textbooks; the trick is to produce it without killing the makers—a feat that calls for chemical-engineering know-how and some form of testing on live subjects. Although dead sheep buried near a makeshift laboratory at the Banjawarn ranch were found by Australian investigators after the Tokyo subway attack, no clear traces of sarin were identified in the carcasses. The best guess is that Asahara was casing Western Australia for a possible hideout to be used while the rest of the world was being annihilated in the Third World War, leaving the guru and his chosen disciples with sufficient sources of raw materials to start the long road back to civilization.

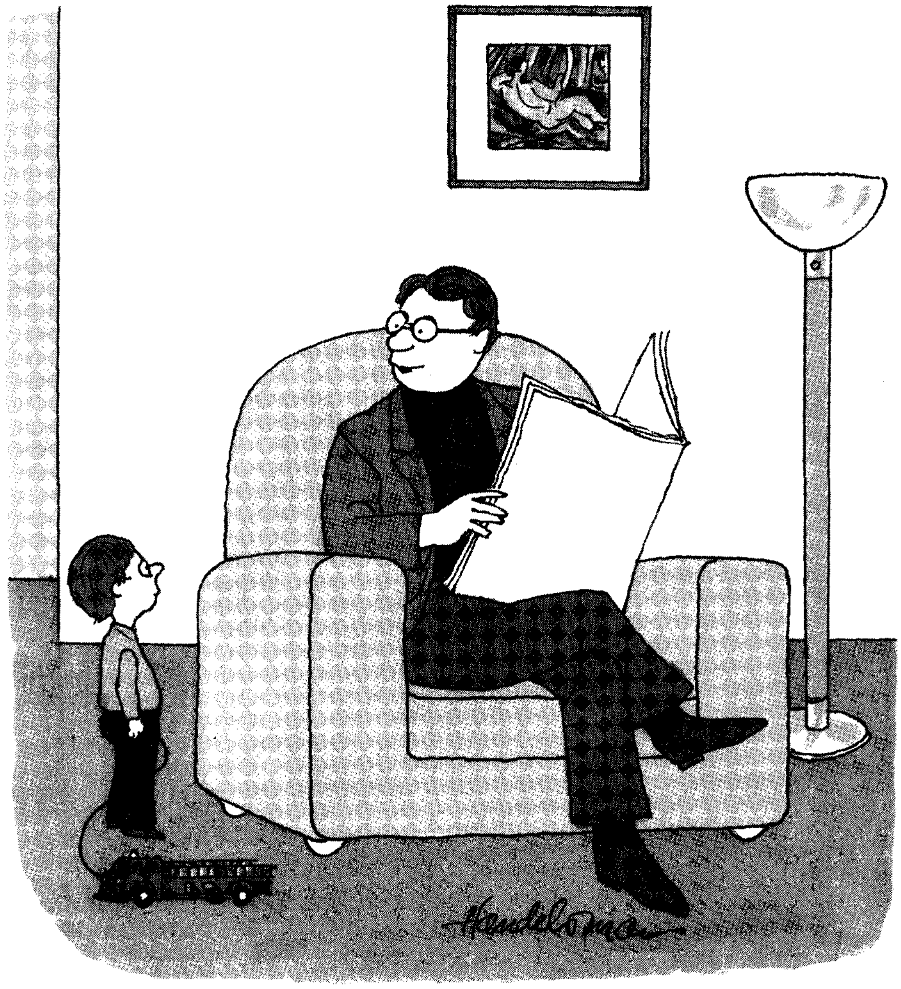
In hindsight, what is extraordinary is how little official attention was paid to these admittedly widely scattered developments in the Aum story. The United States Embassy in Moscow reported nothing about Aum's drive for scientific converts. Australian, American, and Japanese intelligence organizations, which normally exchange much information, knew nothing worth exchanging. Police inquiries in Japan were hesitant and inconclusive. Nor did anyone—apart, perhaps, from the Aum faithful—listen to Asahara's rambling broadcasts from Vladivostok, where, in the manner of "Mein Kampf," the guru was giving a thinly veiled description of his intentions, buried under mountains of incoherent talk.

The over-all picture was ominous, to say the least—a megalomaniac predicting world war, restless world travels, limitless funds to buy weapons and deadly chemicals—but no one tried to fit the apocalyptic jigsaw puzzle together.

IN 1884, Nikola Tesla, a Serb engineer born in Croatia, arrived in New York City with four cents, a pocketful of poems, and an introduction to Thomas Edison. The pair met but soon fell out, as geniuses will. Tesla went on to make practicable alternating current, the system in which Edison's own company was eventually forced to sell electricity. (Edison favored direct current.) For this and many other inventions, Tesla is immortalized by having the unit of magnetic-flux density, the tesla, named in his honor. He kept his romantic side, however, and in his later years (he died in New York in 1943) he experimented with such ideas as tracking interstellar radio waves, a death ray that could destroy ten thousand airplanes at a distance of two hundred and fifty miles (actually a crude particle-beam accelerator), and standing shock waves set off by frequency emanations, with which he claimed he could split the earth in two, like an apple.

These schemes fitted well with the bizarre combination of schoolboy techno-fantasy and genuine scientific knowledge that jostled in Asahara's vision. Six Aum researchers visited the Tesla Museum, in Belgrade, to study the scientist's writings on high-energy voltage and on wave amplification, which, Tesla claimed, could be used to cause earthquakes. His theories, the Senate report asserts, became part of Aum's worldwide search for exotic methods of killing people. In October, 1992, an Aum "medical mission" had arrived in Zaire, ostensibly to help fight an outbreak of the Ebola virus; but, according to an expert who testified before the Senate subcommittee, the mission was actually to collect a strain of the virus for use in biological warfare. In the United States, Aum bought gas masks, computer software for modelling molecular-biological experiments, air-filtration equipment, and much other scientific gear, and negotiated—unsuccessfully—to purchase a laser interferometer, a laser welding machine, and other sophisticated devices worth a total of several million dollars. The export of this type of equipment to China, North Korea, and Cuba is restricted, but Japan is not on the list of proscribed destinations. Witnesses told the Senate subcommittee that only people with advanced scientific qualifications could hope to use such items—assurances that tended to allay, or delay, any suspicion of the purchaser's intentions. In October, 1993, Tetsuya Kibe, who was close to the guru, and another Aum member received helicopter-pilot licenses, after completing a commercial training course in Dade County, Florida. Kibe and another Aum pilot were also trained in Russia. About the same time, the subcommittee reports, a cult member in New York downloaded from the Internet (which the cult used extensively for E-mail and research) a formula for synthesizing green-mamba snake venom.

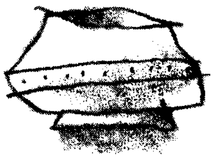
What was the purpose of this selection from modern science's shop of horrors? The cult's plans might have been exposed, at least in part, in the summer of 1994 if it hadn't been for the monumental incompetence of the Japanese criminal-investigation system. Aum had bought a piece of land in Matsumoto, a small mountain city a hundred miles west of Tokyo (which, by chance, has the same name as Asahara's family), through a front company. The seller, discovering who the real buyer was, tried to have the sale annulled. Aum, ever litigious, took him to court. Late in the evening of June 27th, choking fumes drifted through the old part of the town, killing seven people and injuring six hundred others. The fumes had been released from a truck standing in a parking lot near a rest house used by the judges hearing the case. Three judges and other court staff were among those who were injured. The Matsumoto police suspected the first local resident to report the attack, Yoshiyuki Kono, a former chemical salesman, of having accidently mixed the gas from an assortment of chemicals—none of them even poten-



"By the way, Sam, as someday you'll be paying for my entitlements, I'd like to thank you in advance."

tially lethal—while making agricultural fertilizer in his kitchen. The deadly gas turned out to be sarin, mixed by remote control in the back of the truck, which, some members have confessed, was outfitted by Aum technicians at Kamikuishiki. After the attack, they said, Asahara told them, "You did a good job." But the Matsumoto police, having leaked the name of the blameless Kono to the media, made no attempt to follow up the obvious lead to Aum, even though Asahara himself and Aum followers appeared on television to charge that United States Navy pilots had dropped poison gas on the town.

At this stage, one might wonder whether the Japanese police were simply paralyzed by their fear of violating religious freedom, or whether Aum just had a lot of luck. The better explanation seems to be that the Matsumoto police, basking in media attention, were simply out of their depth. As still another defense of Japanese democracy put in place by the American occupation, Japan has no national police force or investigative body analogous to the F.B.I. Local police can and often do investigate aircraft accidents, complicated financial scams, and shoddy-building scandals that take place in their jurisdictions, although they have no special competence in these areas. The Tokyo police, who are competent, can intervene only by invitation, and none was extended in this case. Almost a year later, confessions implicated Asahara and others, who have since been charged with the attack. These confessions led the four national and many local newspapers to apologize to Kono for uncritically printing the police leaks about him. Kono's wife, who was one of the victims of the attack, is still in a coma.



At midnight on June 27th, Asahara and about a hundred of his aides and followers met at an Aum-owned restaurant in Tokyo to inaugurate a new command structure for the cult (as well as, possibly, to provide alibis for the cult members). Until then, the guru's inner circle had been given religious titles, following the Tantric Buddhist practice of admitting adepts to ever higher levels of esoteric knowledge as they progressed through the stages of enlightenment. Now they were also being appointed to a shadow government. Asahara was King of the Law; there were twenty-four ministries and agencies paralleling existing ones in the Japanese government, and a secretariat headed by the guru's third daughter and designated successor, then aged eleven. Only one ministry, Sacred Music (Aum's youthful followers spent a lot of their free time singing and dancing), had anything to do with religion. The rest of the structure was more like a formal cabinet.

AGGRESSIVE or defensive? Anyone with the patience to listen could have heard Aum's plans unrolling in the cult's weekly broadcasts from Vladivostok. In the broadcast of December 25, 1994, for example, less than three months before the subway attack, one of Asahara's disciples mentioned that sarin had been used in the Matsumoto attack (he didn't add that it was Aum who had used it), and he went on to say that VX gas, developed after the Second World War, combined the desirable features of phosphorus-based nerve gases with those of corrosive agents like mustard gas. (The guru and his followers are charged with one murder and one attempted murder with VX, which, the indictments say, was also being made at Kamikuishiki.) The delivery method of choice for these gases, the guru told his listeners, was spraying, presumably by helicopter or slow-moving aircraft. A disciple asserted that the subway station at Kasumigaseki, which is the deepest in Tokyo and was the target of the subsequent nerve-gas attack, had been built as a secret atomic shelter and command post for the Japanese government. The Third World War, the broadcast said, either was imminent or had actually begun—with microwave attacks on the guru's car, which were fended off only by draping it with copper-wire screens.

The Senate subcommittee's report describes Aum as "virulently anti-Semitic," but the broadcasts named Jews as merely one group, and by no means the most conspicuous, on Asahara's list of enemies. At another point, Asahara named the British Royal Family (which has frayed Masonic ties) as sitting at the center of world power. The likeliest attack on Japan, however, would come from the United States, identified as the Beast from the Book of Revelations. Asahara described a number of economic motives pitting the United States against Japan. What it all came down to was a need to hold interest rates under eight per cent.

Alongside these free-ranging forecasts were more specific clues to the guru's thinking, which explain many of the odder design features of the Kamikuishiki complex. The year 1995, Asahara repeatedly said, would be one of catastrophe, as Pluto entered the sign of Sagittarius on January 18th. Not only would there be an earthquake (a reasonably sure bet in Japan) but the Kobe region was the most probable site. Japan was becoming such a free country, he said, that "you could freely use violence." This, he explained, meant that the Japanese state, and "especially the police authority," was growing weak. Aum, he reported, was canning food, ready for the coming calamity. Then St. Manjusri Mitra, an astrophysicist dropout whose real name was Hideo Murai, explained that a mountain region afforded the best protection against the blast generated by a neutron atomic bomb, and that buildings equipped with Aum's newly developed Cosmo-Cleaner could protect the human body from nuclear fallout by "catching" the radiation. (The name Cosmo-Cleaner comes from a sci-fi television serial.)

The major earthquake that devastated the port city of Kobe on January 17th last year, killing more than six thousand people, gave Asahara's followers proof positive that the war to end all wars had begun. The preface to a collection of the Master's sermons and broadcasts, circulated to the faithful after Kobe, revealed that the mysterious Great Power had set off the earthquake either with a small, distant nuclear explosion or by "radiating high voltage microwaves" into the ground near the fault line. The same power, the book's preface hinted, had touched off the Los Angeles earthquake exactly a year earlier and the Gulf War fifty minutes past midnight, Iraqi time, on January 17, 1991. As "proof" that the Kobe earthquake was a planned attack, the preface pointed out that an international conference of mostly United States and Japanese experts on earthquake-hazard prevention, which had been meeting in nearby Osaka, had immediately proceeded to Kobe to view the results of the earthquake, had closely inspected the damage, and had then left without offering any help.

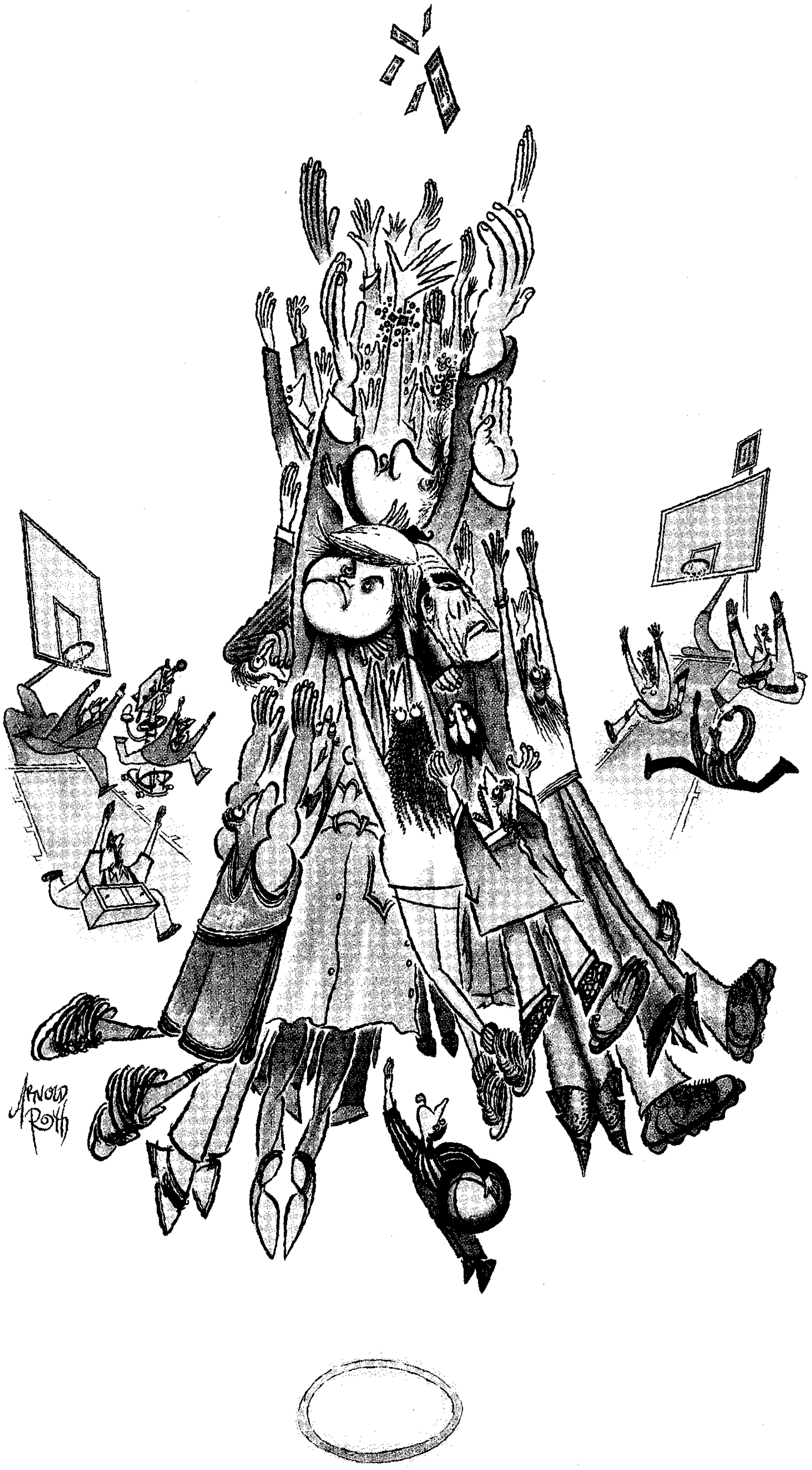
DESPITE the outbreak of clandestine world war, back at Aum's Fuji headquarters the routine of reclaiming backsliders and their assets went on. On February 28, 1995, a bystander saw a Tokyo notary named Kiyoshi Kariya being hustled into a car by four men outside his office and driven away. Kariya's elderly sister had become involved with the sect and had donated more than a hundred thousand dollars to it, much of the money ostensibly for yoga training. The cult, the sister later related, then demanded that she give it a parcel of land. She wavered and then refused, cut her ties with the group, and went into hiding. The cult wanted her back, along with the rest of her property. According to later confessions, her brother was driven to Kamikuishiki, and there cult members injected him with sodium thiopental; he died, apparently of shock, having revealed nothing, and his body was reduced to powder in the cult's microwave oven and scattered along the quiet rural lanes of the neighborhood.

After Kariya vanished, the Tokyo Metropolitan Police took charge of the case, led by their tough commissioner-general, Takaji Kunimatsu. Prodded by the media, which were now clearly linking Aum to Kariya's presumed abduction and to the earlier sarin attack in Matsumoto, the Commissioner decided to raid the cult's Kamikuishiki headquarters. But at that time the Tokyo police had neither gas masks nor protective clothing. They asked the Ground Self-Defense Force, as Japan coyly calls its Army, to lend theirs. Unknown to the police, the Army had been penetrated by Aum (two G.S.D.F. sergeants, both Aum members, have since been dismissed for coöperating with the cult). March 22nd was set as the date for the raid.

Around 8 A.M. on March 20th, prosecutors say, at the height of the Tokyo rush hour, five two-man Aum teams boarded different crowded subway trains, all scheduled to converge minutes later at the Kasumigaseki station, a hub of the Tokyo system, which carries five million riders a day. Kasumigaseki's exits are a short walk from the Japanese parliament, are close to police headquarters and the

SKETCHBOOK • BY ARNOLD ROTH

THE HOTTEST TICKET IN TOWN



"Well, being single and a robot, I'm able to put in a lot of overtime."

• •

finance and foreign-affairs ministries, and are not far from Emperor Akihito's palace. The Aum teams, dressed in business suits, carried inconspicuous furled umbrellas and plastic bags of sarin concealed in morning newspapers. As their trains pulled into Kasumigaseki, they set the bags on parcel racks or on the floors, punctured them with the umbrella tips, hastily got off, took antidotes, and dispersed to Aum safe houses, leaving behind a scene that still sets Japan's national memory shuddering, while the far more destructive Kobe earthquake has already all but faded into history.

SOME of the riders were temporarily blinded as they clawed their way up to fresh air outside, only to collapse on the sidewalks. Those who died included two station staff members who had tried to remove the bags of sarin. Fifty-five hundred people were treated in hospitals; some are still in coma. The Senate subcommittee estimated that if full-strength sarin had been used and had been disseminated more efficiently, tens of thousands might have been killed. Aum's aim, according to some confessions, was to paralyze the Japanese government and police; to delay, or even prevent, the planned raid; and to show that the cult was ready for the Third World War, already secretly begun at Kobe.

Two days later, at dawn, more than twenty-five hundred police and soldiers, wearing gas masks and protective suits, some even carrying caged canaries, simultaneously broke into the Kamikuishiki complex and two dozen other Aum sites scattered all over the country. They were followed at a cautious distance by press and TV crews. Large stocks of gas-making chemicals and equipment were found, and some Aum members were arrested, but there was no sign of Asahara. A few hours earlier, one of the guru's taped messages was broadcast from Vladivostok; it called on his followers to rise up and carry out his plan for salvation, and to "meet death without regrets." To the relief of residents of the Tokyo area (including me), no one rose, but other killings and attempted killings followed. On March 30th, a gunman shot Police Commissioner Kunimatsu four times, and fled by bicycle. The Commissioner has since recovered and is back at work. Two botched attacks were made on Yokohama station, with gases less deadly than sarin; there were no casualties. Aum members have been indicted for these attempts. A letter bomb mailed to the governor of Tokyo seriously injured an aide. Despite mass arrests of Aum followers, the attacks went on.

On April 23, 1995, more than a month after the first subway attack, Hideo Murai, the cult's science minister, saint, and an alleged leader of the sarin attack at Matsumoto, was killed as he left Aum's media-besieged Tokyo office; the murder was captured live on TV. The knife-wielding assassin, a Korean-Japanese, claimed that he had acted to save the honor of Emperor Akihito, but he turned out to have big debts to a *yakuza* group, which would have effectively made him the mobsters' peon. The mobsters, in turn, were reported to have bought and sold large quantities of drugs that Aum made illegally in its laboratories. Members of the cult, it has been surmised, may have ordered Murai permanently silenced, using this previously unknown Aum-*yakuza* connection. On May 5th, the Shinjuku station, another hub of the commuter system, was unsuccessfully attacked with cyanide gas. On May 12th, Aum's top scientist, Masami Tsuchiya, who holds a master's degree in organic chemistry from Tskuba University, confessed to making sarin on orders from high in the Aum hierarchy. (He later said that he had joined the cult because it had better laboratory facilities than his alma mater.) On May 16th, the guru himself was at last arrested. He was hiding—

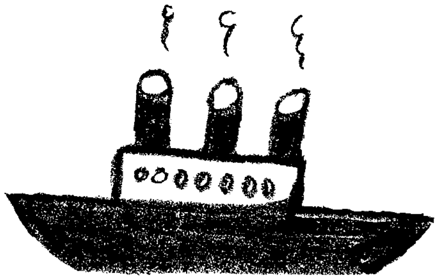
meditating, he said—in a crawl space less than three feet high at Kamikuishiki, where he had been all along. Clutched to his ample paunch was the equivalent of a hundred thousand dollars in cash. Seven of his wanted followers are still at large, but there have been no Aum-related gas attacks or killings since the arrest of the cult's leadership.

WHAT can we learn from these strange and terrible events? Subways, the circulatory systems of the world's major cities, are appallingly vulnerable to terrorists. The X-rays and sniffer dogs used by airlines, even if they were placed at every subway entrance, would not stop gas or deadly viruses from being smuggled below, and even the threat would instill terror, which was defined by Lenin himself as the purpose of terrorism. Only gas masks and protective suits, caged canaries, and antidotes carried in pocket or purse would enable people to get to work in comparative safety. Classifying those allowed to buy sophisticated scientific equipment by the political system they live under, a Cold War relic, is obsolete. In fact, as Asahara shrewdly noted, the freer a nation's institutions are, the easier it is for its malcontents to make ready to wage high-tech war on it.

The threat to civil rights posed by Aum has caused much anguish in Japan, a country that some commentators are presenting in the unfamiliar role of a new, feeble Weimar Republic, too liberal even to defend itself. A measure to revoke Aum's registration as a religion, with its attendant tax breaks, is winding its way through the courts, but a law that lets provincial authorities recognize a religion is still in place, and the task, probably impossible, of setting legitimate limits on a religion has barely begun. Ongoing efforts by the government to redefine the "proper" relationship between political and religious groups are faltering. Meanwhile, one of the key opposition parties is close to another Buddhist group, with its own organization and guru, which is able, it is believed, to deliver a thousand times as many votes as Aum ever could. A coalition of interests, including the Japan Communist Party, has joined Japanese liberals to oppose tentative steps the government has taken to invoke a never before enforced law, aimed at "subversive" organizations and passed at the tail end of the American occupation, to allow surveillance of Aum. The law also enables such organizations to be disbanded by court order, although public opinion is sharply divided on its full application in this case.

Many Japanese continue to wonder what mysterious force enabled a man as seemingly unremarkable as Asahara to get as far as he did in building his monstrous empire. On March 20th, the first anniversary of the subway gassing, the mass-circulation newspaper *Mainichi* demanded, "Why were young men and women—many of them [our] intellectual élites—attracted to Aum, and why did they allow themselves to be brainwashed by a bizarre doomsday doctrine that induced them to commit all sorts of atrocities?" Several commentators have named Charles Manson as one of Asahara's murderous predecessors. There are, indeed, parallels. Manson passed most of his youth in children's homes and prisons, and grew to despise his own country; to many young people disillusioned with the middle-class America of the Vietnam era, he seemed to have reached, many years before they did, their own insights. "My thoughts light fires in your cities," Manson spat at his fellow-Americans—a line that could come from an Asahara sermon.

But Asahara differs from Manson, and from other cult leaders like Jim Jones and David Koresh, in his ability to enlist some of the better minds of the younger generation. In this respect, he shares some similarities with our century's most brutal visionary—another unimpressive man, poorly educated, who preached a ragbag of secondhand ideas and harbored a paranoid suspicion of spies and traitors. Hitler once said about his rise to absolute power, "I am totally convinced that this struggle does not differ one hair's breadth from the battle which I once fought out within myself." He was referring not to the battle against the Allies but to one against the Germany and Austria of smug middle-class respectability, which had rejected his paintings and his warped vision, and had never promoted him above lance corporal. Fortunately, Asahara possessed none of Hitler's ability to mobilize a mass audience. But his fiery certainty of hatred, wrapped in the unlikely robes of Buddha and Jesus, made powerful sense to a confused younger generation, many of them frustrated by the laborious old Japan of geriatric professors who block promotion in the universities; by business cartels that allow little room for new competitors; and by old-fashioned fathers who see no further than the archaic Confucian code of work, deference, and waiting your turn. Of course, most clever young Japanese do not see destruction as the logical outlet for frustration, but some—those who could open the laboratories of modern science to the guru—did. Without these willing, dazzled helpers, the unschooled herbalist's techno-terrorism would have been impossible.



Awaiting trial, the guru has been held in solitary confinement at Tokyo police headquarters; his guards will not guarantee his safety even as far as the city jail, twelve miles away. He dismissed his original lawyer, in an obvious delay tactic. The court then promptly appointed a team of nine lawyers, including the one Asahara had dismissed, and told the guru that if he fires them he will go to trial anyway. Fasting every second day, Asahara has lost forty-five pounds. He refuses to discuss Aum, but the reinstated lawyer has leaked one likely defense to a weekly magazine: the guru told him that he may have given orders that a disloyal disciple should be made "to suffer a little," but he did not order anyone to kill the offender in his presence, and he did not strangle anyone, or see that, or any other, killing carried out—after all, he is blind. Japan has no plea bargaining, but it does have a regularly used death penalty. Convicted murderers rarely escape it without showing remorse; but, to do that, the guru would have to admit that he was a fraud all along, making the killings more reprehensible.

The Buddha, in his infinite compassion for all living beings, may feel something for a man who was once a proud, almost blind little boy, leading his sightless school friends toward an unjust, unkind fate. His earthly future is not bright. ♦

LIFE AND LETTERS

MAKING ADVANCES

What does it take to be the id of American fiction, a role Harold Robbins has played for nearly half a century? Knowing just how far the mainstream wants to swing.

BY IAN PARKER

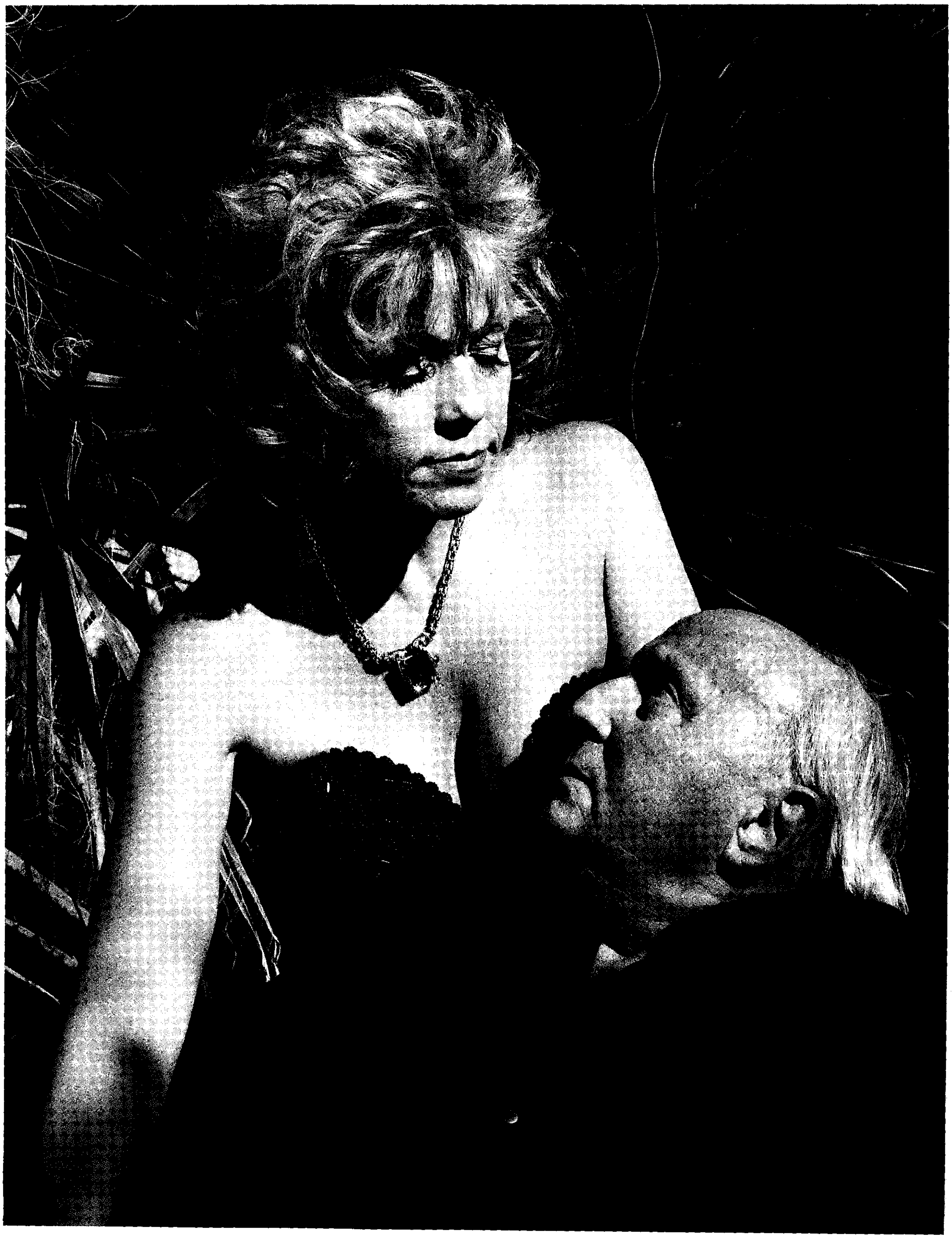
HAROLD ROBBINS, the popular novelist, used to talk of himself as "the only goddam author with his own yacht." In recent years, he has had to give up the yacht—along with the girls, the cocaine, the houses in Acapulco, Le Cannet, and Beverly Hills. This is partly to do with expense and partly to do with the encroachments of old age and infirmity: Robbins will be eighty this year. But he still has something of the air of a yacht owner about him: he has wraparound dark glasses; he has a wife about half his age; he shouts "Tootsie!" across the room at waitresses. He is still recognizable as the playboy-novelist who—spurning nice reviews and a different kind of reputation—happily wrote about money, for money, and about sex, for sex. It has been an unusual kind of literary career—a hustler's or a gambler's career, where the miraculous conversion of stories into boats and babes has often been a part of the pitch to readers. (A typical tabloid headline: "MY LIFE OF SEX AND RICHES BY THE MASTER OF STEAMY EPICS.") Readers were sold both a Robbins story and *the* Robbins story, and were seduced by the headlong rush toward gratification seen in both. Robbins wrote books the way his heroes have sex: quickly, without fuss, and to the satisfaction of multitudes.

Robbins has had to slow down—no more cigarettes, even—but you can see in him the man who sidled up to American fiction nearly fifty years ago, talking about sex. Other writers, some of them grander than Robbins, followed, and profited from that boldness. But Robbins profited, too. He became known, perhaps accurately, as "the world's best-selling novelist." He has sold, his publisher estimates, seven hundred and fifty million books worldwide. At one point, he was said to be selling forty thousand a day. He has earned at least forty million dollars, and he has spent the same amount. The yacht—eighty-five feet long, with just one book, a de-luxe edition of "The Joy of Sex," on display in the main cabin—came into his possession in 1969. "I remember he wanted it so badly," says Paul Gitlin, Robbins's former agent and attorney, and his great friend. "I said, 'Well, you finish the book, there'll be cash flow.' And he did 'The Inheritors' in five, six months. The book was in his mind, but there was no incentive to start writing. But for a yacht? He sat down and wrote a book."

THE dirty old man of American letters lives in Palm Springs, California, in a spacious single-story house close to Sidney Sheldon's and Kirk Douglas's. The Robbinses have a sixty-inch television set, a very long dining table, and a fish tank—brought together in a snazzy, "we meet at last, Mr. Bond" style. There is a bar with a counter made from a kind of clear cracked glass, through which one can see a sculptural arrangement of large crystals, dramatically lit. On the wall nearby is a large caricature of Harold Robbins—looking something like Kissinger with his glasses askew—which is signed (genuinely) "À mon ami Harold, Picasso." Next to this is a Léger, and elsewhere hang four Chagalls, but the work that Robbins most admires is drawn in a yard-sale-realist style and shows a young woman in front of a roaring fire. She is kneeling, and is naked, and has her back to the artist. She is doing something with her arms—stretching while yawning?—but it is hard to tell what. Harold's wife, Jann, whom he married in 1992, said, "I think she's opening a bottle of champagne." She referred the question to her husband, who said, "She's warming her pussy."

Robbins has a small, tanned, attractive face, which looks as if someone had let all the air out of Gore Vidal's. That day, in what passes for winter in Palm Springs, he was wearing a T-shirt and sweatpants, and looked quite youthful. He has a belly but is not a large man, and he rather disappears into his wheelchair, which he has had to use as a result of hip injuries suffered when he fell several years ago. He seems to alternate between two dominant conversational modes. One is considered, courteous, and—toward his wife—almost sentimentally solicitous. The other is none of these things, and might lead you (falsely) to diagnose Tourette's syndrome. He will suddenly say impatiently "Who gives a shit?" or dismiss apparent friends as "bitches" and "cunts." When he combines these two modes, he achieves a gracious smuttiness.

We sat on either side of the bar. He took the customer's side, and from there he had a clear view of a wall on which were fixed twenty-one plaques, each a foot or so wide, and each carrying the first line or two of a Harold Robbins novel, printed white on black: "Mrs. Cozzolina tasted the soup. It was rich and thick, tomatoey, and with just the right touch of garlic" ("Never Love a Stranger," 1948); "The sun was beginning to fall from the sky into the white Nevada desert as Reno came up beneath me" ("The Carpetbaggers," 1961); "It was pissing rain at eleven o'clock in the morning in front of St. Patrick's Cathedral" ("The Piranhas," 1991); and so on. As we talked, Robbins often looked up at these plaques, and used them to fix dates, or to survey his long run in



Harold and Jann Robbins, photographed by Helmut Newton in Palm Springs, December 27, 1995.

American fiction: from plucky, tough-guy autobiographical novels set in the Depression through the pioneering "steamy epics" of the sixties—"The Carpetbaggers," "The Adventurers"—to the sparer novels of the past twenty years—"The Pirate," "The Lonely Lady," "Dreams Die First." A new plaque has been ordered, to mark the publication this year of "The Stallion," Harold Robbins's twenty-second novel.

"One of the things that's bothering me is that I'm slower than I used to be," he said. His voice is a kind of Corleone whisper. "I used to be able to write ten hours a day." He ate a chocolate from a large box on the bar and explained why he has not retired: "I haven't any money. First of all, my medical bills were unbelievable. Then I got divorced"—in 1992. "Cleaned out, really cleaned out. A little at a time, I'm getting back there. I wish I could do more. I'm trying." While he was talking, a cat climbed onto the bar. "She's so happy. She's got beautiful eyes. Sweet girl." Outside, by the pool, Robbins's three little dogs were yapping to be let in. "Shut up, you bastards," he said.

We went out to dinner. Jann Robbins—an easygoing, patient woman of forty-five—wore Versace and Chanel; Robbins wore his dark glasses. Jann drove the car, while her husband kept up a fairly constant stream of half-serious, croaky abuse directed at other road users: "Cocksucker!" "You fucking son of a bitch!" This is Palm Springs, where most driving seems uncontentious; but just as he introduced, say, amyl nitrite and anal sex into the literary mainstream, so Robbins is now pursuing an honorable, if doomed, attempt to cloud the clear, quiet air above the desert golf courses and jokey souvenir shops.

At a grand Italian restaurant, we joined the Robbinses' glamorous friends Eileen (Mike) Pollock and her husband, Bob. The Pollocks were writer-producers on "Dynasty" and "The Colbys," and Mike invented Alexis, who would have relished the restaurant's padded ceilings and padded walls, the menus the size of pool tables, and the kind of very heavy gold jewelry that now looks borrowed from rap, rather than the other way around. Robbins ordered a glass of champagne and a steak, and expressed, perhaps not for the first time, his disapproval of vegetables.

WHY ISN'T IT ALL MORE MARKED?

Why isn't it all
more marked,
why isn't every wall
graffitied, every park tree
stripped like the
stark limbs
in the house of
the chimpanzees?
Why is there bark
left? Why do people
cling to their
shortening shrifts
like rafts? So
silent.
Not why people *are;*
why not *more* violent?
We must be
so absorbent.
We must be
almost crystals,
almost all some
neutralizing chemical
that really does
clarify and bring peace,
take black sorrow
and make surcease.

—KAY RYAN

The conversation was affectionate and high-spirited, although it had to maneuver, with what one took to be hard-won expertise, around whatever Robbins chose to put in its way. When attention shifted from him, he would growl amiably or do something strange with his food or sing, loudly, a line of his own composition: "I love cannoli in the springtime." At one point, Bob Pollock, trying to draw Robbins into the conversation, raised the subject of sexually transmitted diseases, and soon found himself saying, "I once got scabies."

Robbins, across the table, and a little deaf: "What?" Pollock said "Scabies" again. "*What?*" Jann Robbins (who later talked of "selective deafness") tried to help. "*Scabies*, Harold." The word hung in the air. "Rabies? Bob got *rabies*?"

Later, when he wanted to go home, Robbins said, quite cheerfully, "Assholes!" and then, "Get me out of here." He tipped by holding money at his shoulder and waiting for it to be taken.

At the house, Robbins said he had a bad memory. "I would love to remember," he said. He smiled and shrugged. "I went around a lot of places, I went to a lot of parties, and I knew many people." Such vagueness may be genuine, but it conspires with an old habit of misinformation. There is, for example, the question of Robbins's wives. In the nineteen-seventies, Robbins used to let it be known that he had been married five times. Jann Robbins thinks she's the fourth or the fifth. If we believe Paul Gitlin, the figure is in fact only three, including Jann. In Gitlin's account, Robbins was married for many years—until his recent divorce—to Grace, and they had a daughter, Adréana; before that, in the fifties, he had a daughter, Caryn, by another woman, to whom he was not married. At that time, Robbins was married to Lillian. On being questioned about all this, Robbins became coy, and his wife said, "I'm going to leave the room now while you tell the true story. Harold, you tell him the truth. You tell him the truth." When she had gone, he groaned, and then said, rather sweetly, "Jesus Christ, I was married only once. It was this one."

Gitlin also offers an apparent clarification of a question about Robbins's birth. Robbins claims to know only that he was born in 1916, and, within days, was presented to a Catholic orphanage in a Paulist-run parish in Hell's Kitchen, in New York. Gitlin told me that Robbins does know more: "His father was Jewish, his mother wasn't. His father remarried and the woman had children of her own, so he was a stray, so to speak, and the new wife didn't particularly want him around." Robbins fends off concern. "I was fine," he said to me. "The Paulist Fathers take care of kids. They don't want to put them in hell—you know what I mean? I don't think anybody tried to hurt me. Except my ex-wives." He leaned across the bar. "You want a chocolate?"

The Paulists named him Francis Kane, which is also the name of the orphaned hero of his first novel, "Never Love a Stranger." At some point between the ages of eight and eleven, he was adopted by a Jewish family called Rubin, and he took their name. They lived in Brooklyn and, later, in Manhattan, at Broadway and 125th Street; the father was a pharmacist. "They were a lovely family," Robbins said. "I didn't get along with them too much, because they were very straight and I liked to run around." After school, for pocket money, Robbins ran errands both for prostitutes and for a Jamaican drug dealer. "I used to deliver cocaine to Cole Porter," he said.

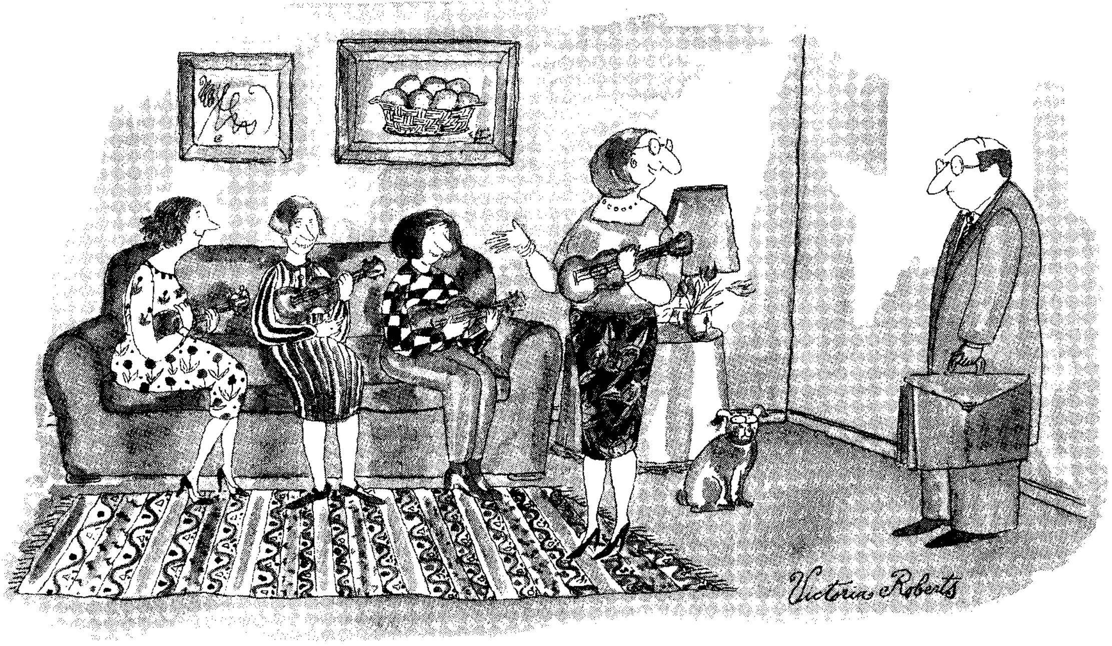
At twelve or thirteen, Robbins was going to matinées at what became the Apollo Theatre, in Harlem: "You'd see two movies, and then the burlesque would start and the old men would come in. And I would get a quarter to jerk them off. I didn't think it was a wild thing. You know, I made a dollar, a dollar and a half, and I had enough money for the day. The only trouble, now I think about it, was they didn't have Kleenex in those days. I had to go to F. W. Woolworth and buy a package of handkerchiefs." I asked Robbins whether he thought he lost his innocence too young. "I'm still innocent," he said, with a mock-lewd smile.

At fifteen, Robbins ran away from home. "I was bored, there was no action. I had no friends, really," he said. Lying about his age, he joined the Navy, and spent two years in submarines, based in Pensacola, Florida—an able seaman earning twenty-one dollars a month. For the first time, he read a lot. This was also a period (his last, he says) of homosexual sex. "Not my kind of thing," he told me. "But you don't have anything else to do. Besides, you're the smallest guy . . . It didn't bother me." Robbins's fiction has reflected this apparent evenhandedness. "Dreams Die First" (1977), set in the pornographic-magazine business, has a bisexual hero, and seems daringly homoerotic for mainstream popular fiction.

Robbins left the Navy and returned to New York. He earned a living first as a snow shoveller and eventually as an inventory clerk for a chain of grocery stores. On the side, he began trading in peas and corn. He borrowed from the banks, paid farmers in advance, and then sold contracts for their produce to canneries and distributors. (The key to the operation was credit, and in his novels Robbins has maintained an almost fetishistic respect for the subject. Characters will say, "If he can't pay the loan, we foreclose on the picture, then all his collateral goes into an escrow account. Then we liquidate until we recover.") Robbins's trading became a full-time occupation, and he started working out of a suite in the Edison Hotel, on West Forty-seventh Street. He made money. He bought a biplane. He went bankrupt. Starting over, he found employment in the New York warehouse of Universal Pictures. Robbins worked his way up and, in the early nineteen-forties, moved to Los Angeles, where he eventually became, he says, Universal's director of budget and planning.

At the house in Palm Springs, Robbins tried to find a photograph of this younger self. He made his way past the tropical fish, past the Chagalls, and into his study, where there were recent photographs of him hanging on the wall: a Riviera swell, with his shirt collar worn over his jacket lapels. Robbins looked in a cabinet for earlier photographs but could find only a calendar commemorating a beauty contest that he hosted in 1976: twelve pictures of young women, partially naked. "They were nice girls," he said. "I got a great photographer to do it, the head photographer at *Penthouse*." Robbins let out a noise—half sigh, half groan.

IN a story that Robbins has told often, his writing career began with a hundred-dollar wager. In 1947, while working at Universal, he bet the then head of production that he could improve on the kinds of stories for which the company was paying three hundred thousand dollars. And so he wrote "Never Love a Stranger," which is still his favorite among all his novels: a carefully structured rags-to-riches Depression story, given texture by what appear to be childhood anxieties concerning poverty, ethnic identity, and sex. Writing about boyhood, Robbins makes space for some leisurely, descriptive prose of a kind that he rarely indulged in again. When plot breaks in, or sex, or violence, a false note is sometimes struck, suggesting an obligation to genre, or perhaps to adolescent bravado: "Without getting up from my seat I hit her across the face with the back of my hand and wrist. I put all the power of



"Howard, you've met my ukulele ladies before."

my hundred and fifty-four pounds into it. She went tumbling onto the floor, chair and all."

The book found an upscale literary home at Knopf, having been championed by the younger Alfred Knopf—Pat—and resisted by his father. "I can't tell you how I won the battle," Pat Knopf says. "I think he washed his hands of it. I think he said, 'If you want it, you take care of it.' I thought it was a terrific book." "Never Love a Stranger" was published in 1948, and was reviewed respectfully, if not with great enthusiasm, in the *Times*. The same paper was soon noting the "vivid characterization" and "feeling for individual scenes" of "A Stone for Danny Fisher" (1951), the book that has earned more literary credit for Robbins than any other. Again, one can detect a tussle between the troubled, contemplative novelist ("I grew up with the knowledge that I was not immortal; that I was made of flesh that would rot and decay into dirt") and the ass-kicking novelist ("No girl ever got knocked up by a finger"), but Robbins again makes the effort—not always made later—to dramatize that conflict, to work it into fiction. In one scene, Danny Fisher sticks a knife into an assailant, then begs to be let into his parents' apartment. "A cold fear was running through me. I banged on the door, leaving bloody imprints from my hand. 'Let me in, Papa!' I cried hysterically. 'Let me in! I got no place to go!' " *Life* wrote later that if Robbins had quit after he wrote "Danny Fisher" that book "would have reserved him a small place in literature."

Bernard Schoenbaum

"A pretty good day so far. Someone asked me how to get to Central Park West."

At that stage, could Robbins have been a contender? Could he at least have held his own with the earnest, middlebrow likes of James Jones and Irwin Shaw? Mario Puzo, the author of "The Godfather," has said, "If Harold had wanted to be a seriously literary author, 'A Stone for Danny Fisher' was a literary book. But Harold was a smart guy, and he knew he was going to starve to death if he kept writing like that." Others, speaking unattributably, have told me, "Harold sold out," or "Harold made a Faustian pact."

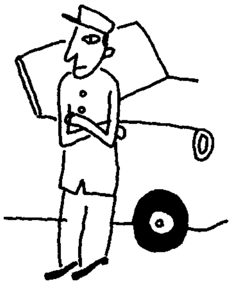
"Of course," Robbins said. "I've always sold out. I sold out with the first book, the second book, the third book . . ." Was there another route, which he chose not to take? "No. I only wrote what I could write." This is about as far as Robbins will take such questioning. He does not relish literary conversation. He even seems to have abandoned the old bragging—"I'm the world's greatest writer in basic English," and so on. To me he acknowledged admiration only for Dickens and Steinbeck, but he chose not to elaborate. "Steinbeck was my hero. We met a few times, when I was in New York or when he was in New York." What did he think of your work? "He never talked about writing." What did he talk about? "Cunt. That's all."

ROBBINS left Universal in the late fifties. "They terminated him," Paul Gitlin told me. "Absenteeism." Robbins first appeared in Gitlin's office soon afterward, clutching a hundred and twenty-five pages of what would become "The Carpetbaggers." He was then a successful novelist but something of a wreck: his debts were out of control; he had lost a custody battle for Caryn, his daughter; and he was fighting with his publisher. Gitlin managed to free him from Knopf—the discomfort had become mutual—and "The Carpetbaggers" was published, in 1961, by Simon & Schuster, who had created a new hardback imprint for it, Trident Press. In honor of this novel's significance in Robbins's life, he still has, and wears, a baseball cap with the slogan "No. 1 Carpetbagger."

"The Carpetbaggers" was a roman à clef—it was generally thought to have been inspired by the life of Howard Hughes—and that is a genre to which

Robbins has subsequently shown great fidelity. It was a long narrative, covering twenty years, and it switched with some aplomb between first- and third-person narrators. (Asked about his longstanding fondness for this device, Robbins said, in the mock-sleazeball voice he also uses with his wife, "Well, sometimes I like a little pussy and sometimes I just like to talk about it.") Its hero was Jonas Cord, Jr., who is seen exercising great power in the aviation and film businesses, and also in the bedroom. Distinguishing between these arenas sometimes required attentive reading: "I felt her shudder and tremble under me and a shrill scream came from her wings." As is often the case with Robbins's heroes, Cord had a cynicism that is never explained, and about which the book seems to make no judgment. When a film was made of "The Carpetbaggers," in 1964, starring George Peppard and Carroll Baker, an unlikely new element was added: motivation. Cord was provided with all sorts of unfinished psychological business. Robbins hated that. His people get on with it (as in "Finish your whisky while I get my dress off"), and you tend to learn that a character has arrived at insight only by reading the dust jacket, where reference might be made to ending-up with-everything-but-having-nothing. Robbins's characters, living in a constant present, experience pleasure and pain, but they pay scant attention to causes or consequences. (One common plot device in Robbins's fiction is the Very Stupid Act. For example, accepting money from gangsters to throw a boxing match, then deciding not to; or putting all one's money in silent films around the time of "The Jazz Singer.")

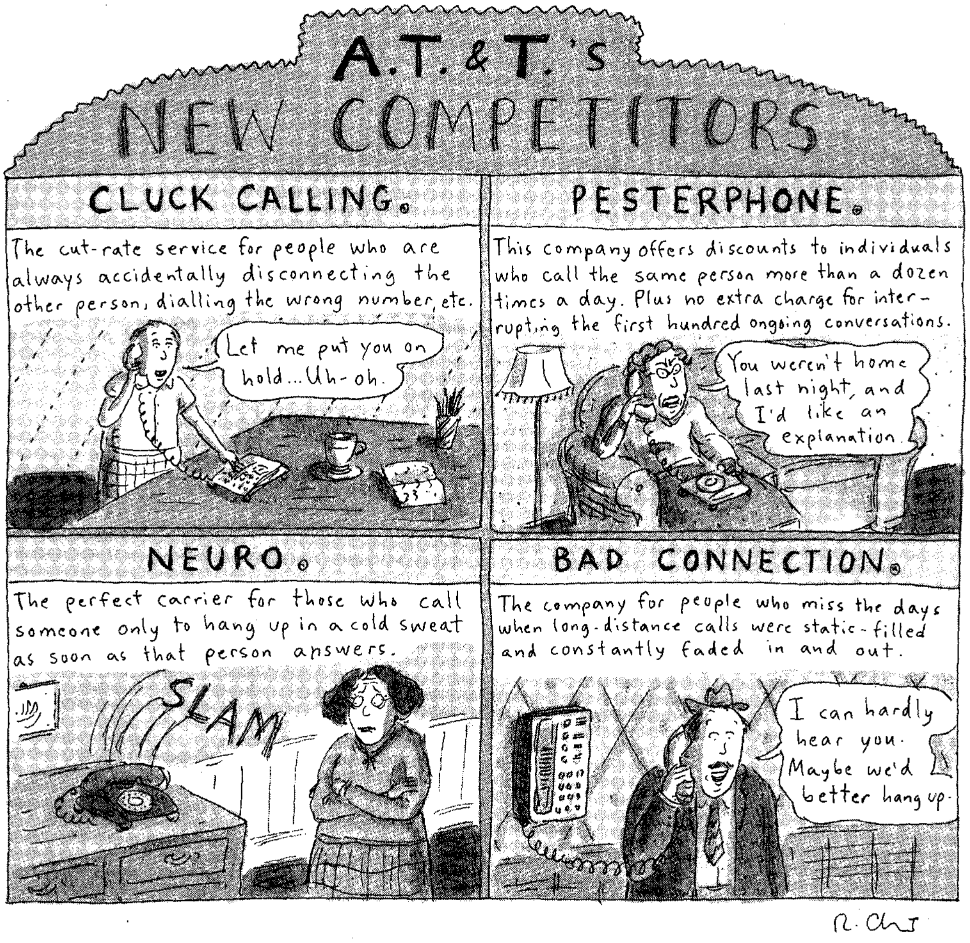
"The Carpetbaggers" would sell more than seven million copies by 1975; and its success is not properly explained without reference to sex. Robbins had written sex scenes before, and he had pressed at the limits of sexual acceptability. According to Robbins, Pat Knopf bought "Never Love a Stranger" because "it was the first time he ever read a book in which on one page you'd have tears and on the next page you'd have a hard-on." In "The Carpetbaggers," though, Robbins pressed much further than before: after only a few pages, Jonas Cord has violent sex with his recently widowed stepmother. The novel later features gay and lesbian scenes, a sexual study of a thirteen-year-old girl, rape, abortion, and self-castration. And, while Robbins's narrator aimed for a certain linguistic decorum ("pubis," curiously, has become a favorite Robbins word), his characters spoke their minds. This was new, and the date of its appearance is significant. Just a few years earlier, the United States Supreme Court had issued a landmark decision that, over the next decade, helped lawyers and judges to lift restrictions both on new works—"Howl," "Lolita," and "Naked Lunch"—and on such previously banned books as "Tropic of Cancer" and "Fanny Hill." In a sense, the key to Robbins's career is the fact that "The Carpetbaggers" was published soon after one of the most important of these legal successes—Grove's 1960 victory against the banning of "Lady Chatterley's Lover" (a victory echoed in Great Britain the same year). " 'The Carpetbaggers' could have sent any retailer handling it to prison before 1960," according to John Sutherland, professor of Modern English Literature at University College, London, and one of the few academics who have made a study of Harold Robbins. "The 'Lady Chatterley' victories meant that you could have all these classics at last, but it also meant that there were new freedoms to be had. And Robbins was quick off the mark." We can regard Harold Robbins as the first to write a Harold Robbins novel. He eroticized commerce, to the probable delight of his businessman readers; and, at the same time, he commercialized erotica, dashing into a rich new market for dirty books. Jann Robbins remembers that when she was a child her grandmother read "The Carpetbaggers" with "a flashlight, in between the bed and the wall, so that no one would see." When she finished the book, she burned it.



Sutherland calls Robbins "a pioneer in the field." And Robbins opened the field to others. Jackie Collins, who first read Robbins at the age of eleven, calls him an "exciting and encouraging" influence. (She says, "I always remember thinking when I read him as a teen-ager that when I started to write novels my women would be as strong as Harold Robbins's men.") According to Sutherland, Robbins also had an influence on more literary fiction: "Look at 'Portnoy's Complaint.' Or Norman Mailer—look at 'An American Dream,' " published in 1965, "which begins with the hero coming in, strangling his estranged wife, having anal sex with her maid, and throwing his wife's body out of a window. He's occupying some of the space that Robbins cleared." (Robbins on Norman Mailer: "Some of his first books I thought were great, and then he got on to a lot of things that were not as good." Robbins on Philip Roth: "I can't stand him, because I can jerk off better than he did. I've got it in all the books. I don't know what they're making such a fuss about.") One can follow Robbins's liberalizing influence beyond fiction: when Lenny Bruce was on trial in New York, in 1964, a defense attorney asked a witness about obscene language, with particular reference to "motherfucker," "cocksucker," "fuck," "shit," and "ass." Q: "Are those words also used in 'The Carpetbaggers,' a book by Harold Robbins, presently being sold?" A: "Yes."

FROM "The Carpetbaggers" on, Robbins would force a reconsideration of what was due a successful novelist. I asked Gitlin how Robbins, who was forty-five years old in 1961, had reacted to his success. "Well, the first thing he did, he got a fur coat." Gitlin has an infectious laugh—*heh heh heh*. "And then he left his wife."

Within a few years, Robbins would be telling the *Times*, "All the [television] networks can pay a writer is in the low six figures. I can't do my best work for that kind of money." And Gitlin would be explaining to the same newspaper, "We structure the deal first, and then Harold worries about the writing." For thirty-five years, Gitlin structured extraordinary deals—for domestic rights, foreign rights, television, movies. (The rights to "The Adventurers," published in 1966, were sold for a million dollars before Robbins had written a word. More than half of the novels have been filmed or televised, often with Robbins as pro-


A.T.&T.'s NEW COMPETITORS
CLUCK CALLING.
The cut-rate service for people who are always accidentally disconnecting the other person, dialling the wrong number, etc.
Let me put you on hold... Uh-oh.
PESTERPHONE.
This company offers discounts to individuals who call the same person more than a dozen times a day. Plus no extra charge for interrupting the first hundred ongoing conversations.
You weren't home last night, and I'd like an explanation.
NEURO.
The perfect carrier for those who call someone only to hang up in a cold sweat as soon as that person answers.
SLAM
BAD CONNECTION.
The company for people who miss the days when long-distance calls were static-filled and constantly faded in and out.
I can hardly hear you. Maybe we'd better hang up.
R. Chast

ducer.) Robbins began to be called "the world's best-paid writer." Gitlin says, "He couldn't get enough money. And when he had it he pissed it all away. The last big deal I made for him was two and a half million dollars—maybe for 'Memories of Another Day,' in 1979. Thinking back, that was the only peaceful time I had with him. There was so much money coming in that he couldn't spend it fast enough."

Robbins was impatient—a word used by many who know him, and upgraded by at least one to "impossible." As Gitlin puts it, "Harold wanted things." He adds, "His background. The orphanage. No parents. Always hungry. That's enough to drive somebody to want to live another way." Robbins wanted a house in Le Cannet, near Cannes; he later wanted a yacht in the Mediterranean, and a house in Acapulco, and a four-million-dollar mansion in Beverly Hills with a guard at the gate. As money began to pour in, Robbins expressed his regret at not having been born rich: "I could have had a ball at twenty instead of having to wait until now."

In Le Cannet, Robbins met Picasso; both men were walking their dogs. "All he talked about was girls," Robbins recalls. Picasso said to Robbins, "I hear you've written some very pornographic books," and Robbins gave him one in Spanish. Picasso repaid the gift with a caricature of Robbins based on the book-jacket photograph. (Perhaps misunderstanding his subject's priorities, Picasso replaced the cigar held in Robbins's right hand with a pen.) James Baldwin, recuperating from illness in 1965, was a pampered guest in Le Cannet; he wrote to his brother about being fed by Robbins's resident cook "as though I were a prize hog." On the boat, which was named Gracara (for Grace, Caryn, Adréana), Robbins was—according to the boat's former captain, Ken Minns, speaking in the nineteen-eighties—"one hell of a ladies' man." Robbins says, "I thought all the girls and all the women I knew were very exciting, and if I didn't get a shot at it I might not get the shot again."

In Los Angeles, Robbins threw legendary parties. His friend Steve Shagan, the screenwriter and novelist, says, "He tried to create the jet set around him—the excitement around him that he wrote about. His parties were without any limit. There was a buffet fit for Henry VIII, there were beautiful girls all over the place, there were gay people and straight people, and there were black people—black people didn't *go* to Beverly Hills parties." Robbins tended to walk around, observing, or else he would leave: "He'd say, 'Let's get the hell out of here. It's boring.' " Over the years, in an effort to outrun boredom, Robbins has owned nine Rolls-Royces and—in partnership with Frank Sinatra and Sammy Davis, Jr.—a Learjet; he won two hundred and ninety thousand dollars in one night at baccarat in Monte Carlo; and, he says, he took "all kinds of drugs." He adds, "Jesus Christ. I can't believe how good they were. Now they tell you they're not healthy!"

Harold Robbins, who has said, "All writers are whores," wrote only to earn money, and wrote only under pressure. "We'd put him in a hotel in New York for six or eight weeks," says Len Forman, former vice-president of marketing at Simon & Schuster. "He'd knock out a novel. And every year we had a new novel." In time, the books became shorter, and restricted in subject to the life styles of the powerful, placed in a context of some contemporary relevance (Middle Eastern politics, organized labor, American evangelism). The novels still had pace and sexual daring, but they began to feel as if they were not fully holding their author's attention.

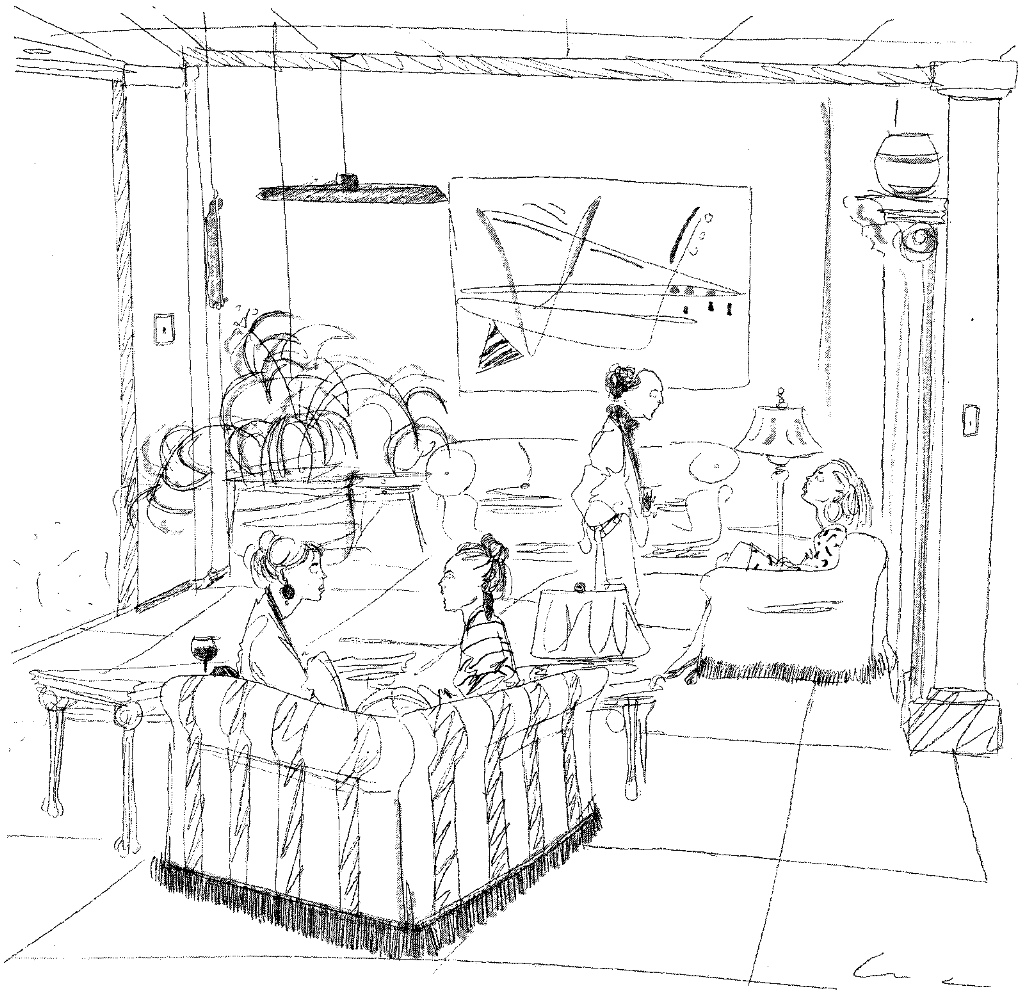
To the relief of some readers, Robbins pulled back from the unflinching, brutish violence of, say, his 1966 best-seller, "The Adventurers." Playboys on dope took its place: "Though the master cabin was large, taking up almost one-third of the interior of the Boeing 707, the air was heavy and overladen with the pungent scents of hashish and amyl nitrite. . . . He looked down at the giant king-size bed that took up almost half the cabin. The two girls lay in each other's arms, their naked bodies gleaming in the soft golden light." This is from "The Pirate" (1974), Jann Robbins's favorite, and a book that had the honor of providing material for "The Adult Life of Toulouse-Lautrec" (1975), a novel by the experimental writer Kathy Acker. In 1990, Acker wrote that her ambition had been to "see what would happen when the underlying presuppositions or meanings of Robbins's writing became clear." Robbins, she wrote, was "emblematic of a certain part of American culture." What happened, she decided, was that "the sterility of that part of American culture revealed itself."

Camille Paglia does not agree. She is a sincere admirer of the late-period Robbins. Paglia recalls the "sizzle" of Robbins at publication—"a sense of taboo, a sense of transgression; that weird evil feeling." She says that postwar literary fiction has failed to come to terms with sex, aggression, the supremacy of television, "the huge amoral energies, the tornadoes, that are loose in industrial captialism." In her view, Robbins's pared-down, cinematic novels are true to their age. "Harold Robbins was a prophet of a sensibility that used to be scorned," she declares. "This is America! This is the voice of America!"

HAROLD ROBBINS'S new novel, "The Stallion," is set in a pared-down, cinematic corner of industrial capitalism—the motor industry—and forges a typical Robbins amalgam of sexual swagger and business swagger. (At the end of the first chapter, someone says, "I'm pregnant as hell.") "The Stallion" is a sequel to "The Betsy." Robbins's previous novel, "The Raiders" (1995), was also a sequel, and Robbins explains this new development in terms of "pressure" from Simon & Schuster—still his publishers after thirty-five years. Speaking in a tone of disappointment rather than self-pity, Robbins said, "They're not interested in authors or books. They set a book a certain schedule and"—a conveyor-belt gesture—"they go 'Shoosh.' 'The Stallion,' I don't know if it's that good or not. I'm just carrying on the old characters. It's stupid shit. . . . I think I've done better things, and I hope to do better things. If they leave me alone." It seems possible that this kind of talk is linked to quite sturdy rumors that Robbins did not write these last two books—that they were farmed out by his publishers, in an unacknowledged continuation of the "Harold Robbins presents" novels of the nineteen-eighties. Robbins said that the closest he has ever come to literary collaboration is the modest editorial help given him by his present wife.

Whatever the facts here, Robbins was able to show me evidence of recent writing. He showed me the first typescript pages of his autobiography, provisionally entitled "Who the Fuck Knows Anything?" He is at his daughter's wedding, as the manuscript opens, nursing a Scotch on the rocks (a Robbins detail as essential as a poorly secured bathrobe or a certain "jutting" aspect to breasts). Robbins did not want me to quote from the typescript, but he paraphrased the first paragraphs: "At the end of the wedding day, I'm sitting at the bar, just like now. A friend comes over and says, 'A very interesting painting—who's it of?' And I don't know. *I don't know*." It was a painting of Robbins's own wife, and Robbins did not recognize her. This was because he had just had a minor stroke.

That was in April, 1982. A few weeks later, Robbins met Jann Stapp, his future wife, for the first time. ("I think we fell in love the first time we met each other," she says. "I felt he was the most wonderful thing.") She was a new secretarial assistant at the house in Beverly Hills, and it was she who found Robbins when he fell in his bathroom, following a seizure connected to the stroke. He fell again later. His damaged hips did not fully mend, and for some time he walked on crutches. For the past two years, he has used a wheelchair, and is in fairly constant pain, although



"What's wrong with me? Why don't I care how their apartment flows?"

he has managed to publish five novels since 1982. ("It's a bitch," he said of the pain. "I've got to find some way to get this thing *organized*.")

Besides the falls, Robbins's stroke induced a slight case of aphasia, which has set up a maddening roadblock between his mind and his mouth—or, more markedly, his mind and his typewriter. Sentences that set off in good shape often reach their destination in some disarray—with words missing or rearranged. Jann Robbins tends to fill in the missing words, taking the pages as they come off the typewriter ("I can tell when he's on the sex part," she told me. "He's typing like crazy"), or else Robbins himself recognizes errors on rereading.

Robbins and Stapp moved to the curative climate of Palm Springs eight years ago, and they married on Valentine's Day, 1992, a week after his divorce from Grace became final. When I spoke with Jann Robbins alone, she praised her husband's generosity—to her family, to others—and his spontaneity. "I went to the grocery store one day—I was gone maybe an hour, hour and a half—and I get home, and he says, 'You better put on some nice clothes, because they're bringing over a Rolls-Royce I bought over the phone.' " She also said, "He knows how to make a woman feel like a woman." The Robbinses seem to have found a happy, affectionate life. Instead of the former jet-setting schedules, they now use local restaurants, and see local desert friends, like the Pollocks and Steve Shagan. They keep in touch with friends from Los Angeles, like Quincy Jones. Robbins also seems to have a fairly large group of ex-friends, removed from his circle by death or by ill feeling. His anecdotes often end with "We don't speak anymore."

IN a restaurant in Palm Springs, Bob and Mike Pollock had a lunch party for thirteen people. It was in honor of their actor friends, Carroll Baker and her husband, Donald Burton, who had performed locally the night before. We sat outside, under ficus trees, in great splendor. Everything was bright and sparkling. Makeup compacts clicked open and shut, and sent reflected sunlight darting across the table. As if in tribute to Robbins, many of the guests told dirty jokes. In the dappled sunshine, charming middle-aged millionaires took turns talking about a doctor giving himself a penis extension, say, or Santa Claus buggering a foolhardy young man on Waterloo Bridge. These guests were younger than Robbins, but you sensed his influence on their generation—his achievement as a declassifier, a granter of sexual permission.

I sat next to Carroll Baker, who has known Robbins since she played Rina Marlowe—the Jean Harlow character—in the movie version of "The Carpetbaggers." ("Mistreat me, make love to me, anything, only get it over with. . . . Anything, everything—then throw me out.") She told me he was "the greatest party giver of all time," and went on, "I remember a party at the Four Seasons. There was a girl at each table that nobody sort of knew. Then, at a certain point, these girls started taking their earrings off." Baker was doing a mime. "Then this, then everything else. And they sat there, completely starkers, and the party went on. He was totally outrageous. He really did shock." She looked over at him. "You know what's so sweet about Harold Robbins? He's always meant sex. And he still does. He *looks* at you, and the whole look is lascivious."

Leaning over, she asked Robbins why he hadn't written a sequel to "The Carpetbaggers," and he told her that he had written one and it was called "The Raiders." She said, joking, "With a part for Rina Marlowe?" He said, "Rina Marlowe died." She said, "What about the ghost of Rina Marlowe? Come on." Robbins said, "O.K., naked, so she can sit on my face."

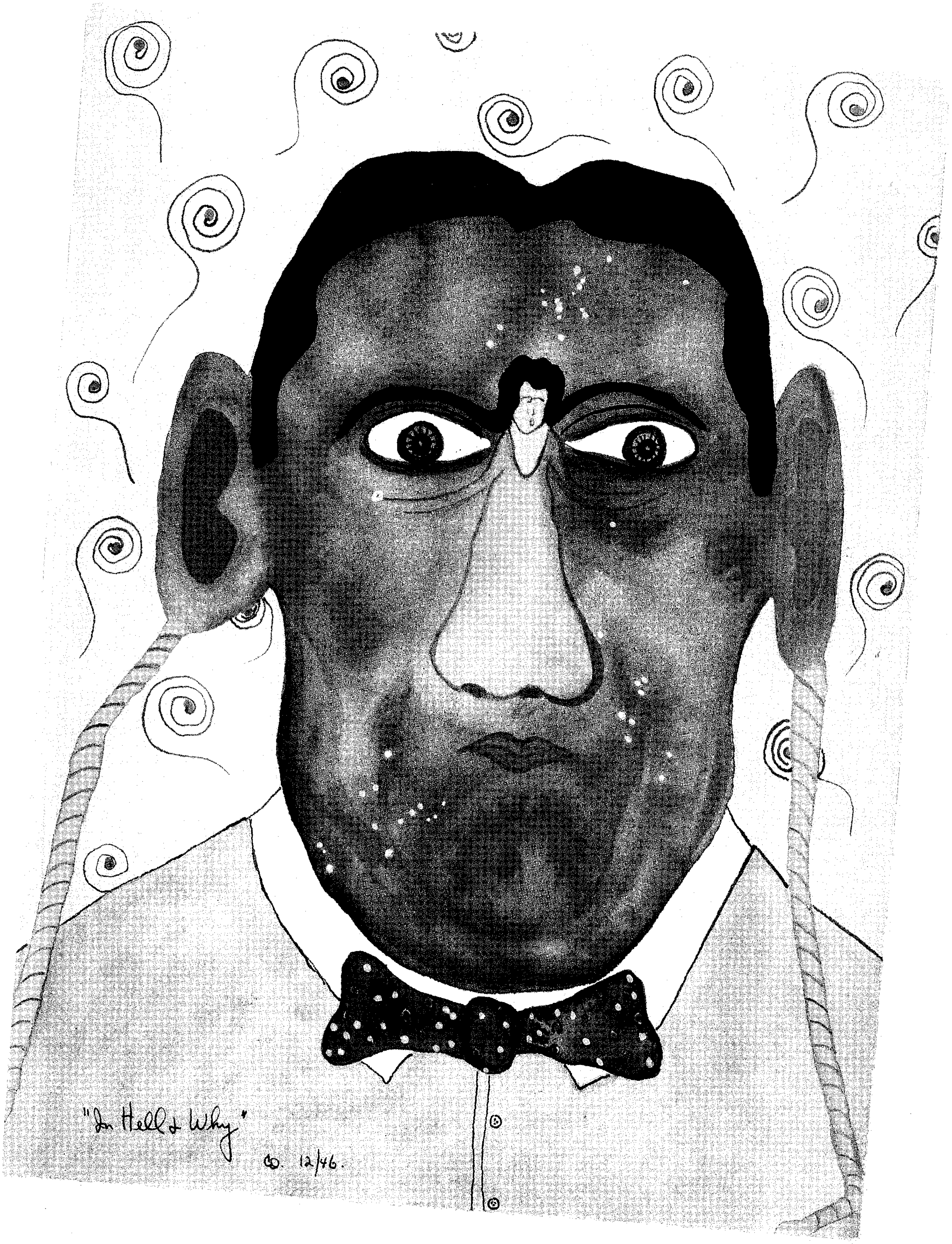
Later, at the house, Robbins told me a story: "An interesting thing—I was a great friend of Jimmy Baldwin, the writer, and he had a heart attack, and I had him stay at my house in the winter in the South of France, and he was there for about seven months, and then he had gone away to Istanbul or somewhere with his lover—he was homosexual, as you know. And I'm walking along the street, on the Croisette, and some young girl comes up and says, 'Oh, Monsieur, you are the famous American writer!' I said, 'I don't know if I'm famous, but I'm an American writer.' She said, 'Oh, yes. May I have your autograph?' And she gave me a piece of paper, and I wrote my name, and she looked at it and said, 'You're not James Baldwin?' " ♦

AT THE GALLERIES

ODETS'S COLORS

CLIFFORD ODETS was a radical playwright whose Depression-bred works are now more praised than produced, and whose subsequent years in Hollywood were progressively fallow and disillusioned. Just when this shorthand view of the playwright seems to have hardened into gospel, along comes an exhibition of Odets's paintings on paper that reminds us how colorful and productive those melancholy Hollywood years really were. "In Hell and Why," the title of both the exhibition (at the Michael Rosenfeld gallery, April 11th-June 8th) and the painting reproduced here, displays about fifty of the hundreds of modest-sized works that Odets created during sleepless nights and usually gave to friends. (His own home was filled with Modigliani, Matisse, and Klee.) Some of these faux-naïf paintings date from the mid-forties, when Odets made a spectacular movie-directing début with "None But the Lonely Heart" and then worked for R.K.O. Most, however, were produced later in the decade, a politically paranoid time, when the playwright was polishing such seriously camp melodramas as "Humoresque," starring Joan Crawford as an arts patron and John Garfield as her violinist protégé. (Crawford: "Don't you like Martinis?" Garfield: "Not particularly." Crawford: "They're an acquired taste—like Ravel.")

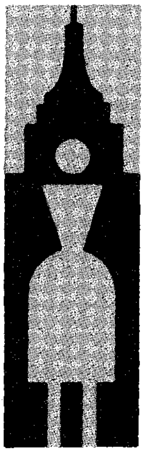
If Odets's paintings are consistent stylistically, thematically their concerns are diverse. They can be politically pointed ("Senator Crapsey"), theatre-related ("Othello, Last Act"), or just plain fanciful ("Summer Accident Making All Men Kin"). They give stylized evidence of Odets's inner torment, but they are also reminders of his sensual side. In the exhibition catalogue, for example, there is an excerpt taken from Odets's journal (and published in Margaret Brenman-Gibson's excellent biography of the playwright) which reads, "Sometimes, as now, I contemplate with absolute amazement the fact that a man and woman together and naked can make such mad pleasure. So it is that nature makes all of us indulgent monsters with Sir Instinct as chief pimp." —BRENDAN LEMON


"In Hell & Why"
CO. 12/46.

FICTION

NEW YORK GIRL

BY JOHN UPDIKE



IN those days, New York seemed as far from Buffalo as Singapore does now. I used to take the train, all eight stultifying hours of it, or drive, on Route 17, stopping off in Corning and Binghamton, where we had clients, and then coming down through the Catskills into Westchester County. Once you were in New York—I used to stay at the Roosevelt or the Biltmore, right around Grand Central Station—you were on another planet, a far shore. It cried out for you to establish another life. Time, at home so filled with the needs of the house, of the children, of the wife—Carole felt herself aging, from her gray hairs down to her varicose veins—was here your own, hours of it, and no one to tell you how to fill it, once the day's appointments had been kept. Extruded nonferrous metal, mainly aluminum alloy, was our product. Combination-storm-window manufacturers were our big customers, but in the sixties a sideline had developed in metal picture frames, and this brought me into contact with the lower echelons of the art world. I visited galleries to see what they needed, and in one of them, on an upper floor on West Fifty-seventh Street, I met Jane.

She wasn't plain, but she wasn't a conventional beauty, either. There was something asymmetrical about her; not just her smile but her whole bony face, with its high cheekbones and powdered-over freckles, seemed a little tugged to one side. When she gestured, her arms and hands appeared too long, with an extra hinge to them somewhere; her gestures involved a lot of sudden retraction and self-stroking, as if she were checking herself for loose parts. She kept flipping back her long straight hair, a dull reddish color that reminded me of pencil shavings and the cedary fragrance that arises when you empty the sharpener. She wore a beige knit minidress and black panty hose; her hips were wider and her thighs fuller than one would have expected from the bony top half of her body, and this added to her touching aura of being off balance, there in the merciless brightness of the display space. The white walls held hasty abstractions, blue pigments smeared on white-primed canvas, all the same size and framed in thin cold-rolled steel, like a row of bathroom mirrors.

"I'm not here to look at the paintings," I apologized. "Just the frames. To get an idea of what you need."

"I guess inconspicuous is what we need," she said, fluttering one long hand at the cruel wall and then quickly resting the same hand on the ball of her shoulder and giving it a squeeze. "A lot of the artists can't stand any frames, they say it creates a mind-set, they want it to look rough, and are fighting the rectangle in any case. But we find," she said, relenting, with a heart-catching crooked smile, "the customers are reassured, if there's a frame. It shows it's *fin*ished; the artist *means* it."

"I'm interested more in the flanges," I said, but she knew already that I was interested in her. I had gone stupid; something existed between us like a mist. In those benighted days such an interest was considered not an affront but a datum, to be factored into whatever one's life equation was at the time. Jane and I were both in our early thirties, a time for fresh calculations. Back in Buffalo I had survived, with my helpless family, a tumultuous infatuation and its explosive dénouement; in the aftermath I had adjusted downward my estimate of how much happiness I could extract from the world, and of how much I could offer any woman not my wife. I was wised-up and shy. But then New York was another world—an infinity of restaurants and apartments and elevator shafts and human appetites. I wasn't due home until late tomorrow night.

"For the flanges," Jane said, after a gawky hesitation and an alarmed stare that for a second burned through the mist that had arisen between us, "you maybe need to come into the storage room." There, in a crammed but not totally disorderly clutter of unframed art and unassembled frames, T-squares and knives and a scarred worktable, we sat on tippy tall stools and each smoked a cigarette.

"What do *you* do, Stan?"

I described my job, as a blended engineer and salesman of alloy extrusions. I described my eight-room house, my three-child family, my two-car garage in Eggertsville, and the new red Toro snowblower with which I tried to keep a path open through the fabled snows off Lake Erie. "Now tell me about you."

She smoked like someone who had never smoked before, bringing the cigarette to her lips with a flattened hand, the fingers tensely curved backward. She stabbed out the butt in a clunky green ashtray as if she were crushing a stubbornly vital bug. "No time for that, sweetie," she said, dismounting from the stool with an awkward hop. Her shoes at the end of her long full-thighed legs were a startling shiny scarlet, like red nails on black fingers. "I hear people out front. Maybe they're stealing the art. I should go encourage them." She added, "I have a child, too. A nine-year-old boy. No husband, no car, no snowblower, but a child."

This time her hesitation and her stare had a clear import: it was my turn to make a move. It was my turn to be awkward. "Would you, would you like to have dinner tonight? Or do you have better things to do? I bet you do."

Somewhat to my disappointment—I foresaw complications—she was not busy. "Sounds good to me," she said, brushing her hair back from one ear in a thoughtful way. "How about to you? You don't sound too sure."

"What about the boy?"

"I'll get a sitter."

"Really? On such short notice?" In Buffalo, sitters were sullen teen-age girls, off in a fourteen-year-old's dream world, or else grandmotherly women, widows and spinsters, who were highly valued and had to be signed up weeks in advance. I did feel dubious, but the mist between us was thickening.

"Really. Eight o'clock too late for you? I'll feed him and tuck him in. Here's the address—it's a walk from here. Don't be afraid; it'll be fun."

JANE lived on the West Side, twenty blocks north of where she worked. That night, or one soon thereafter, I was amazed to discover that numbers of cabs were cruising those streets at three in the morning. I had been fearful, stepping onto Columbus Avenue, drowsily emerged from the warmth of her bed. Our whispers of farewell still hissed in my ears; her last kiss was evaporating under my nose; my whole body felt as defenseless as a slug's. I left because of the boy, so he wouldn't find me there when he awoke, and because of my wife, who might have been telephoning the hotel, frantic with some domestic emergency. Carole had a nervous, clinging streak beneath her trim aplomb. I had led her into multiple motherhood and then kept running away.

Now I had my own emergency: the empty straight streets stretched to vanishing points around me; a mugger—did we call them muggers then?—could be waiting, switchblade ready, in any of the upright dark doorways, behind any of the brownstone stairs. But an all-night drugstore gleamed two blocks away, and fits of traffic animated the avenue. Within a minute or two, a taxi materialized, its roof light signalling rescue. The driver and I were usually chatty on these returns to my hotel—he was pleased to have a fare and my tongue was oiled by sexual repletion and a sense of escape. Those rides through the almost deserted city had a clean, clicking feeling of getting back on track. Pulling up at the hotel, paying the cabdriver, walking in my warm dishevelment past the noncommittal desk clerk, into the elevator, down the windowless corridor, into the still, expectant room, I rejoined a self who had been here all along. The bed was cool and tightly made, with a mint on the pillow.

Sometimes Jane came to my hotel. Once, when I had left the room dark in anticipation of her arrival, she asked as I let her in, "Is this where the orgy is?" Another time—the same time? how many times were there?—we couldn't open the door when it was time for her to leave. It was absurd and frightening; an invisible enforcer had trapped me with the living evidence of my crime. This was after 2 A.M.—long past time for Jane to be rejoined to her post-orgy self and to send the babysitter home. A woman in the apartment below would sit for her at short notice. A sisterhood of single New York women existed, egging each other on in the long-odds game. Men—useful, unattached, heterosexual men—were scarce, scarcer here than in the hinterlands; Jane taught me this to her disadvantage, for I rarely worried, in the months between my trips to the city, that she would not be there for me, as glamorous and game as ever.

The mystery of the locked room was never completely solved. The moral standards of hotel management were obscure to me; I stammered guiltily, calling the main desk. For what seemed many minutes of waiting, Jane and I were prisoners together, fully dressed and physically weary. Finally, a black maintenance man turned the latch from the outside with a master key. He fiddled bemusedly with the obdurate inner knob and chatted with us as if we were the most ordinary, consecrated daylight couple who had ever required his expertise. We made a small society, at that odd hour; he and Jane hit it off, especially, vying in theories on the mechanical puzzle. She said, "I thought it might be like a subway turnstile—you needed a token." It was a revelation to me, this wee-hour camaraderie of New Yorkers, and the city's genial way of folding my adultery into its round-the-clock hustle.

CAROLE and I had met in college—the University of Buffalo. A math major, she was bright, methodical, compact, and rounded. She had thick glasses and thin, serious lips. I saw at a glance that she would be a trustworthy partner and mother to my children. My estimate was sound; she was all I could reasonably ask for in a mate. We both studied too hard for much of a formal courtship; we just palled around and in our senior year agreed to get married. So to stop at one of Manhattan's corner flower shops and buy an armful of roses or gladioli was a rite of manhood I was undergoing for the first time. I was in a kind of limelight, playing opposite the veteran Italian actress behind the counter, with her faint mustache and frayed sweater and tightly wound iron-gray bun into which a yellow pencil had been thrust at a dramatic angle. All my senses were heightened a notch: I registered with a feverish keenness the petalled colors massed with their reflections in the black display window, and the chill that wafted out of the glass-doored refrigerator where the cut flowers were stored, and the angry deft gesture with which my co-star plucked the pencil from the back of her head and scribbled the receipt before sending me out into the street with my green cone of blooms. Bearing flowers enlisted me in the city's anonymous army of lovers. A few bright doorways up Columbus Avenue, I would stop at the liquor store for a quart of Wild Turkey—the most expensive brand of bourbon within my sense of possibilities. At home, Carole and I drank Jim Beam, and not much of it. But I was somebody else here, a sugar daddy from Singapore. Flowers and liquor—what else could I take Jane to clothe my naked gratitude? I did not drop in at the liquor store often enough—four or five times a year—to warrant a greeting from the dour brothers who owned it, but after a year I could see something flicker across their wary faces, a suspicion that they should know me, that I was familiar. My courtship glow made me stand out, perhaps. I was perhaps a young husband, new to the neighborhood and still dazzled by the delights of domesticity.

A surely imaginary happiness bathes my memories. Once in January I stood at Jane's front windows looking down at the tops of a row of buttonwoods as a slanting wet snow laid crescents of white on each little round pod, while the apartment at my back overflowed with the plangent human pealing of the Swingle Singers performing Bach fugues—a record Jane had received at Christmas, I didn't ask from whom—and I felt joy to the point of tears; my body, wrapped in a loose wool bathrobe of hers, felt stuffed inside with the spiritual woolliness of sexual contentment. At my back, just off the kitchen, she was setting up our breakfast. Cylinders of orange juice and a squatter cylinder of marmalade glowed with inner light. The healthy scent of English muffins toasting intersected the sight of the diagonal snow adhering to the buttonwood pods. The morning moment kept overflowing, on and on, Bach going crazy the way he does, never getting enough. Jeffrey, Jane's son, was with a friend or his father, and so this once we had the apartment to ourselves. I had spent the night, daring the phone back at the hotel to ring. Jane was close enough to my size so that I could wear her blue robe. I could never have got into a robe of Carole's. What I loved in Jane was her excess, her muchness—the hips so wide she walked with a seesawing lurch, the cedary hair that was always falling into my face, the angular downy arms, the legs that stretched to the corners of the bed. It was a single bed; we had slept badly, snoring in each other's faces, dodging elbows.

Her ex-husband was an artist, not successful enough to supply child support or for me to have heard of him but not so unsuccessful that he had to abandon an artistic image of himself. I hated and envied and could not imagine her world of artists—their lofts and debauches, their self-exemption from the ruck of the ordinary, their quick cynical minds and mouths, their otherworldly charm. Nine-year-old Jeffrey was doe-eyed and shyly polite, perhaps because I always saw him when he was being put to bed, at the moment of Jane's and my going out together. His tiny room's one tall window looked south, upon the lights of midtown mounting in rectangular masses higher and higher—an Arabian Nights view that made me grateful to have been granted a small illicit purchase upon such display, such splendor.

Jeffrey was precocious at school, and Jane was proud of that. Occasionally he and I talked; my impression was of a sly docility toward me, a guarded hope. His mother's loneliness was the air he breathed, and I gave him a brief change of air. He was blonder than she, English-looking, with a pointed chin and pale skin and rosy cheeks; only his owlish brown eyes and black eyebrows gave evidence of another strain, his father's. He had read lots of Tolkien and C. S. Lewis; at school, he was having a little trouble with how to add unlike fractions. Of the men in the margin of his life I must have been the only one with a degree in engineering.

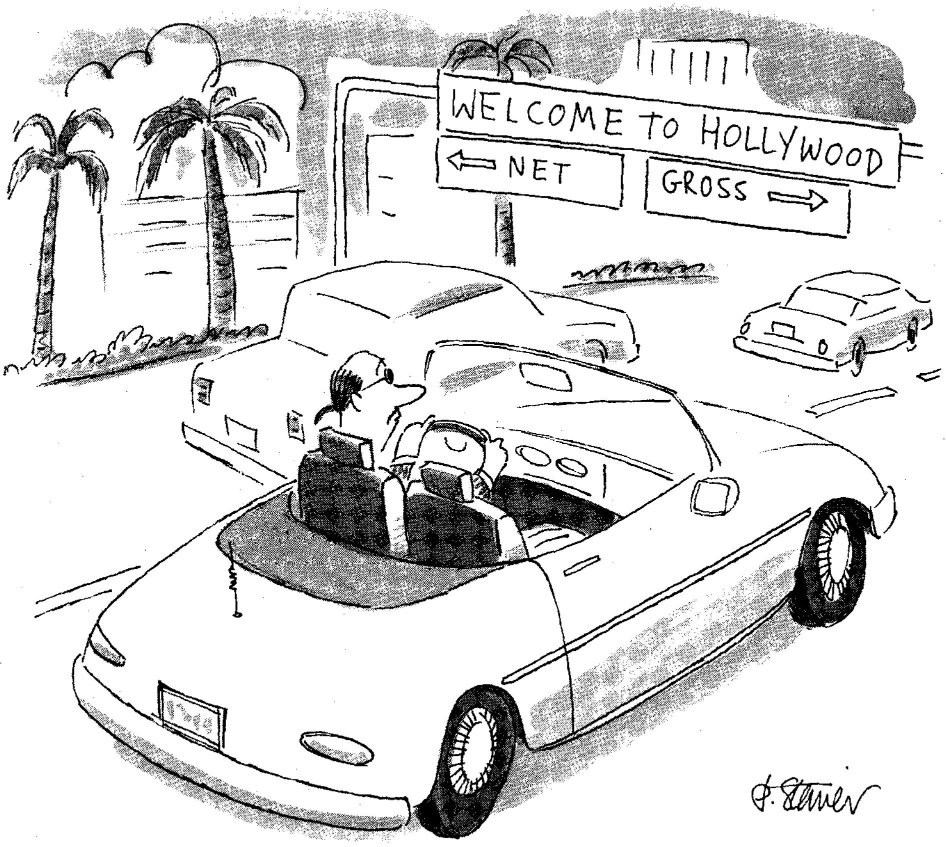
"You make the numbers so nicely!" he exclaimed, when I began to instruct him in common denominators.

"You've got to. If they're not clear they're worse than useless. That kind of '4' you make, with the closed top, looks too much like a '9.' "

"But, Stan, the '4's in books all are closed like that."

"Books get away with a lot we can't get away with in real life," I told him, paternally. It was enchanting, somehow, to be called Stan by a child the age of my own children. I was momentarily a member of this family, but the membership was woven of angel hair, insubstantial, with none of the weight of real family ties. I was temporarily magical, to go with their magic, so precariously posed in midair here, between the tops of the buttonwood trees and the stacked skyscraper lights.

Jane's apartment was furnished with cheap chic; unframed out-of-series prints were tacked to the walls and instead of end tables she simply used stacks of art books and catalogues. I felt unprecedentedly nimble in this apartment, light-footed, stealthy, stealing happiness from these rooms and then gliding out the door, into the elevator (how loud its doors and gears seemed, in that solidly sleeping building!) and on to the barren streets that with mysterious quickness yielded a roaming cab, its third eye blazing.



ADVENTURES! Adventures with Jane. We had to eat. After the maintenance man finally let us out of my hotel room, we were both famished and found an all-night Automat on East Forty-second Street. It was like entering a Hopper with a Petty girl on my arm. Escorting Jane into any restaurant felt luxurious. We never phoned ahead—I didn't like jostling with the fruity, accented voices at the name places, La Côte Basque and so on—but New York abounded with half-empty no-name restaurants where they were happy to see you; the maître d' beamed at the sight of Jane, in her miniskirt and falling long hair. I remember a pricey Swedish smorgasbord in the East Fifties, and a steak place with Texas décor and big windows overlooking Third Avenue, and a fish place with wooden tables somewhere south of Washington Square. Broadway plays took too long to waste our precious time together on, but she did lead me to an "underground" movie somewhere in the dreary Thirties, and to a play in the Village about a group of dope addicts sitting around waiting for their "connection" to show up. I kept hugging her during the play; its message of hopelessness, of addiction, seemed to be directed at us, and to enlist us in the scattered troops of rebellion in those pre-Vietnam years. But she pointedly did not respond, as if asserting, while her straying hair tingled against my cheek, that my romantic sense of it all let me off too easily.

The art movie had no plot that I can remember; there was a lot of grainy slow panning and some jumpy surrealistic collage, including a quick, repeated act of fellatio that caused Jane to exclaim softly at my side, "Uh-oh." The act was faked with photographs of a dildo and a young woman's face, not matter-of-factly enacted for the camera, as it would have been a few years later. For the time, it was daring, as was Jane when, in bed, not without awkwardness, she startled me by suddenly dipping her head to touch her lips to the tip of my erection, like a small girl yielding to the impulse to bestow a kiss on the bald head of a favorite doll. The kiss was quick and light and seemed to startle her as much as it did me; it remains in my mind an isolated moment, lit by a flower-shop glow—the moist sheltered intimacy, the expectant soft petals. I didn't press her to repeat the gesture, feeling it had stemmed from an overflow I was in no position to force. I could take, but I couldn't demand.

What did she get out of me? A lesson in chopsticks. We had wandered into a rather overdecorated, underlit Chinese restaurant on Lexington Avenue, with gold wallpaper and royal-blue banquettes. Chopsticks were provided in little paper sheaths, but Jane reached for the knife and fork also set beside the plates. I asked her, "Your other dates let you get away with that?"

She blushed and bristled defensively. "My other dates, as you call them, don't take me to Chinese restaurants that often."

I tried not to be curious about her life in the long stretches when I wasn't there; it would have been painful for me to know too much, and painful for her to confess that there wasn't much to know. "Not classy enough, I suppose," I accused her, defensive in turn. Back in Buffalo, a Chinese meal out was a manageable treat for the kids or an easy way to see the boring couples Carole liked. I told Jane in a gentler voice, "Chinese food and silver shouldn't mix. There's no big trick to it." I unwrapped her chopsticks and took her long freckled hand in mine. She seemed faintly frightened. I saw myself for a second in the mirror of her female mind: I was a man, frightening, with big prehensile hands. I told her, "You rest one of them here, against that finger, so the thumb holds it in place, and hold the other between these two, like a pencil. Feel the mobility? With this pinching motion you can pick up anything, from a single grain of rice to a chunk of sweet-and-sour pork."

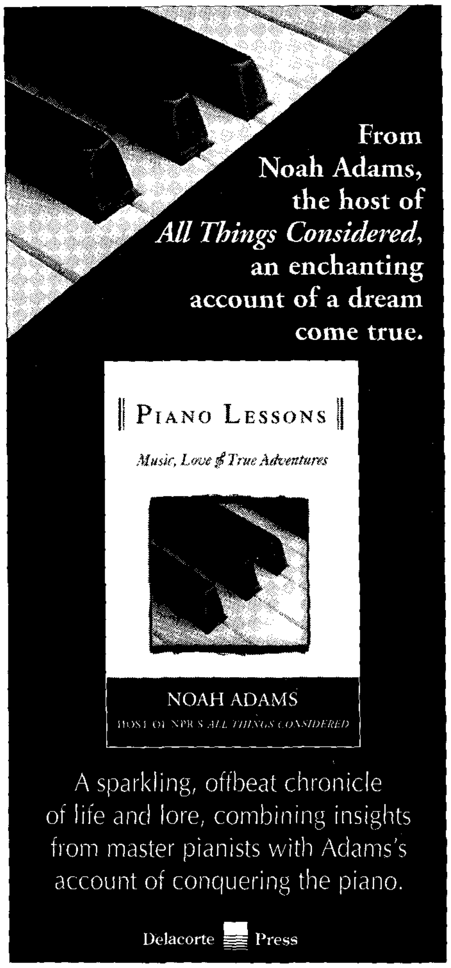
"I can do it!" she announced, after a while. "This is wonderful! Oops. Damn."

"Rice is the hardest. Sort of put them together like a shovel."

"Over thirty," she said, "and I never thought I could manage chopsticks. I'd watch other people twiddling away, and they seemed so debonair. *Thank* you, Stan."

I accepted her thanks seriously; I was proud. I doubt whether Jeffrey really got the hang of common denominators, but I want to think that to the day she dies Jane will be at ease with chopsticks because of me.

I AM losing her. The mist that arose when we first met, surrounded by glaring blue scrawls, threatens to swallow all the details. The chopsticks, the taxicabs in the depths of night, my proud impersonation of a man buying flowers for a sweetheart—what else can I remember? We must have talked, thousands of words, but of what? Our expertise was in quite different areas, and if we talked too long about our marriages we would trip upon the fact that hers was ended and mine was not. Once when, after a longer absence than usual, I entered her, she breathed in my ear, "He's home," which almost unmanned me, it seemed so sad an untruth. My home was in Eggertsville, with the three children, the tired furniture, the Saturday-night dinner parties, the Sunday-morning men's tennis group for me and the Methodist choir for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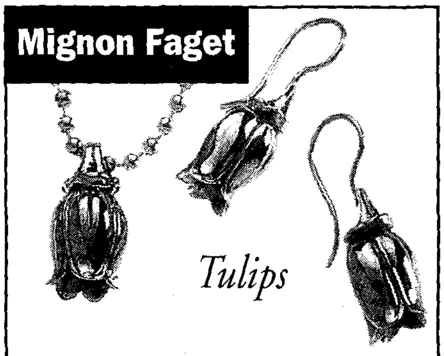
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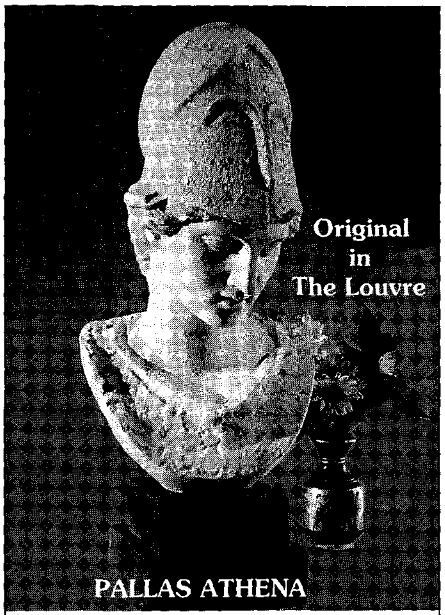

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Carole. Jane's appeal was exactly that she was *not* home, that she was a splendid elsewhere.

New York City did not miss me; it did not occur to me that she might. Once, explaining away a weepy mood—Jeffrey had a fever, she did not think she should leave him with Brenda from downstairs, so we sat together, in our clothes, in the room with the view of the tops of the buttonwoods—Jane let drop, "Yeah, but you haven't been racing downstairs every day to the mailbox hoping for a letter from Buffalo."

Her letters to me, directed to my office at the plant, somehow bored and embarrassed me, as well as putting a funny look on the face of the department secretary as she delivered one, addressed in Jane's sprawling round handwriting, to my desk. The struggles of the gallery to survive, her glimpse at some opening of Robert Motherwell, Jeffrey's progress at school—the details of her world, when I was not there, seemed meagre and unreal. The details of my own might estrange her by painting a life less lonely than hers. In Buffalo I had everything I needed for a life, except for her, my New York girl, tucked into my consciousness like a candy after dinner, like a mint on my pillow. "I have nothing much to say," I told her. "Except that I adore you."

" 'Adore' implies a distance, doesn't it?" Jane had a stern face she reserved for people who came into the gallery just to loiter on a cold day. She clumsily stubbed out her cigarette, smoked down to the scarlet filter, in a fashionably rough clay ashtray on her stack of art books. She had caught Jeffrey's cold and kept clearing her throat.

"You don't want to hear," I assured her, "about which child of mine has had his bicycle stolen or which dog has died."

"I don't?"

"Or how Carole had a flat tire doing the car pool, or how drunk So-and-So got at some other So-and-So's dinner party."

"This woman you almost left Carole for—you still see her?"

"Althea Wadsworth. Sometimes, at big occasions. We all put a good face on it. Life must go on."

"I suppose that's what it must do, yes."

I was not comfortable with the tug of this conversation and went to the front windows, wondering if this was the last time I would ever see these treetops. To the north, there were few skyscrapers, just a low recession of streets and domestic windows. It might almost have been Buffalo, along Seneca Street.

"For this Althea person, you really put yourself out. You tried to leave Carole for her."

It displeased me, suddenly, that Jane knew these women's names. I suppressed the impulse to explain that I had seen how Althea functioned as a suburban housewife and mother—that I could envision her fitting into Carole's slot. I knew all the furniture she would bring with her. Jane's furniture was impalpable—it was the city itself, the universe of anonymous lights.

"I did, and I swore I'd never try it again. It was too painful, for everybody."

Jeffrey began to cough in the other room—a dry, delicate, only-child's cough—and Jane went in to him. I heard murmuring as she rubbed his back. She began to sing. I had never heard her sing. She had a sweet voice, reedy but true, with an unforeseeable hillbilly twang to it. "You are my sunshine, my only sunshine," she sang softly to Jeffrey. "You make me happy, when skies are gray."

After a while, the boy asleep, she came back to me, and, unhurriedly, moving about with the high-haunched ungainly grace of a deer, she took off her clothes. We made love on her foam-rubber sofa, with its shaky chrome legs, and afterward we ate through six toasted bagels and two half-pints of cream cheese. This may have been the last time I slept with her, but I doubt it. We phased out very gradually. The extruded-aluminum business was facing an onslaught of fresh foreign competition—from South Korea and Taiwan, after all we had done for them—and Buffalo became more involving and complicated, both at work and on the social front, and I stopped rigging trips to New York.

ALTHEA and I had been married for close to fifteen years when I saw Jane again, in Rochester. Rochester, of all places, in the middle of winter, at one of the entrances to Midtown Plaza, where they have the clockwork-puppet shows. Christmas was over, and the season's snowfalls had been compressed to a blotchy corrugated ice, hard as iron. Jane was accompanied by a blond boy I took for Jeffrey, but of course Jeffrey would be in his twenties, I realized. The boy was tugging at her, against the tilt of her crooked smile, and I could hardly talk, since the old mist between us had arisen, plain as she had become. She had put on a lot of weight. Her middle-aged face was round and red beneath a wool knit cap, and she was wearing one of those black quilted winter coats that serve as a suburban matron's uniform. Dog hairs and what looked like a few bits of straw were clinging to it.

"Jane, my God," I said, reeling backward from the firm, even complacent hug she bestowed, through our wraps. "What are you doing here?"

"I live here," she announced. "In Irondequoit, actually. We bought an old farm."

We? I put off exploring that. "How—how long?"

"Oh, ten years. This is Tommy."

"Where's Jeffrey?"

"In Taos, trying to be a painter, the poor darling. God, it's been bliss for me to get away from *artists*. What selfish boyish shits they all are. Ken works for Kodak—he's a chemist. We met the same way you and I did—he was trying to sell the gallery some process."

"Not a process, I just wanted to look at flanges. But can you stand it, Jane, out of New York? The city, I mean."

She put a great black-mittened hand on mine, and even through the wool-lined leather I felt the rightness of her touch, the velvety rightness come back to me, a texture of youth, when the world bristles with options. I felt in her presence the fear of death a man feels with a woman who once opened herself to him and is available no more.

"I hated New York, I was dying to get out of it. You knew that, Stan. It's what made you shy."

"I—"

But the strange child was tugging her toward some keenly imagined pleasure within the mall, and the touch of her hand was pulled awkwardly away. Flipping that hand in midair, she urged me, "Don't say a thing, sweetie. Be happy for me is all you have to do." ♦

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A CRITIC AT LARGE

GOODBYE, 1939

How New York gave birth to the Auden revival.

BY NICHOLAS JENKINS

No episode in the century's English-speaking literary world came as more of a surprise than the poet W. H. Auden's abrupt departure, in January of 1939, from Britain for the United States. Auden was the first major English-language poet to be born in the twentieth century (in 1907); now, as the century drains away, it seems likely that he will turn out to be the only poet of world stature born in England in the last hundred years. He is more widely read than he has been for many years, both here and in England, and Auden scholarship is flourishing. (A multivolume "Complete Works" is under way and, along with several memoirs, two major biographies have been written: the most recent, from Pantheon, is Richard Davenport-Hines's absorbing "Auden.") Auden was perhaps the most important English poet since Tennyson, and yet he never aged into the role of National Fossil, like the author of "Idylls of the King." In 1892, Tennyson was laid to rest in Westminster Abbey, attended by the Foreign Secretary, the Lord Chancellor, Henry James, and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. In 1973, Auden was buried in an Austrian village graveyard, watched over only by family members and close friends. "In relation to a writer, most readers believe in the Double Standard," he once commented tartly. "They may be unfaithful to him as often as they like, but he must never, never be unfaithful to them."

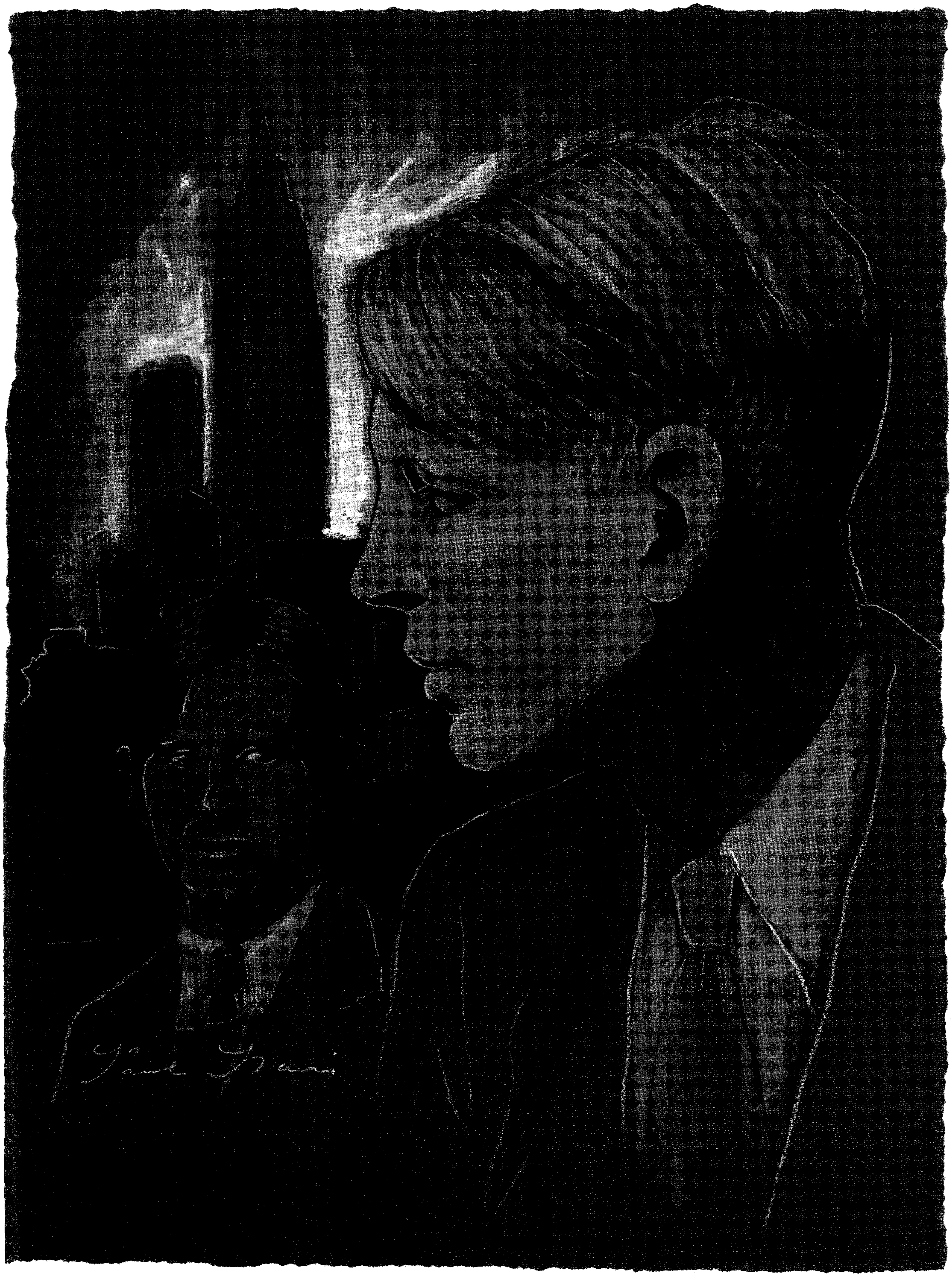
Although the state of exile became a virtually de-rigueur element of the modernist condition, none of the major literary expatriates before Auden had left their own countries voluntarily while they were at the height of their reputations. (Joyce, Pound, James, Eliot, Stein, and Conrad all emigrated before they hit their stride.) For Auden, who by the end of the thirties was distressed and exhausted by his public role as the poetic spokesman for a set of left-wing causes he believed in only half-heartedly, his move was a kind of dying and a kind of rebirth. The first poem he completed in America was an elegy for W. B. Yeats, who had just died. But in it he also mourned his former self, his British readership, his familiar cityscapes. Within the space of little more than a year in New York, he entirely recast the terms of his life and his career. He started the process of becoming a United States citizen; he lost his faith in the power of politics to alleviate unhappiness; he fell in love for the first time; he went back to the church he had been in flight from since childhood; and he gained literary access to an inner world that he had never before been able to write about directly.

This may sound like a triumph, but to Auden's enemies and venerators alike the consequences of his migration looked very different. Many British critics felt—and feel—that he was never as great a poet once he left England. (They conveniently forget that most of the poems they think of as his best work were written when he was abroad for long periods in the thirties.) Young readers felt abandoned by their spiritual leader, and members of the literary establishment raged—often for decades. When Auden died, the novelist Anthony Powell peered over the top of his newspaper at Kingsley Amis and announced, "No more Auden." Amis murmured something about the shock, and Powell fired back, "I'm *delighted* that *shit* has gone. . . . Scuttling off to America in 1939 with his boyfriend."

Throughout the thirties, Auden, though never a Communist Party member, had given expression to the emotions of a broad coalition of liberal and left-wing anti-Fascists and anti-imperialists. His emigration in 1939 came to be seen as the first in a sequence of notorious leftist betrayals: he belonged to the disaffiliated generation that included the spies Burgess, Blunt, Philby, and Maclean—the first important clutch of traitors in British political life for hundreds of years. Auden's offense was, of course, vastly different from that of the spies, but he felt his dissidence had similar causes. In the fifties, he told a friend, "I know exactly why Guy Burgess went to Moscow. It wasn't enough to be a queer and a drunk. He had to revolt still more to break away from it all. That's just what I've done by becoming an American citizen." At a single stroke, Auden generated an enduring parable of the edgy relationship between writer and audience. And, in doing so, he established his own rootless modernity.

Auden grew up on the outskirts of industrial Birmingham, Britain's "second city," the third son of a cultivated doctor father and a highly religious (and highly strung) mother. They were Anglo-Catholics, and Mrs. Auden loved to inveigh against the feebly progressive notions of the Birmingham church hierarchy; Auden wrote that on Sundays in that grime-caked city their life was suffused with "music, candles, and incense." In this intense, cloistered atmosphere, Auden picked up a fascination with "medicine and disease, and theology"—the sicknesses of the body and the spirit. "Health is the state about which Medicine has nothing to say," he later noted. "Orthodoxy is the state about which Theology has nothing to say." Happiness, he might have added, on the evidence of his own work, is the state about which Poetry has nothing to say.

Like most upper-middle-class English boys, he was sent away to prep school while still young, and it was there that he met the future novelist Christopher Isherwood, who was to become his closest friend. Auden wrote his first lyrics at the age of fifteen, and at sixteen he began reading Thomas Hardy fanatically, studying him under the bedcovers and writing Hardyesque poems during study periods. He also began getting up early and going to his desk unwashed, setting rigorous sched-



W. H. Auden (right) and Christopher Isherwood just before they put England behind them and moved to New York.

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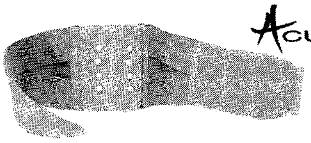

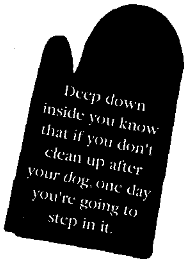
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ules for his literary projects—treating writing, he said later, not as an inspirational mystery but as "a real occupation like banking or fucking, with all its attendant egotism, boredom, excitement and terror."

Auden went up to Oxford in 1925 as a scientist, but he soon switched to English, and spent his free time in his rooms, reading and writing poetry, much of it bad. Nonetheless, he impressed his college acquaintances with his intellectual authority, and in 1930 he burst onto the British poetry scene, under the sponsorship of T. S. Eliot, who was an editor at Faber & Faber, with a volume of cryptic lyrics called simply "Poems." Over the next few years, Auden's writing established him as the leader of a group of young, more or less left-wing poets including Stephen Spender, Louis MacNeice, and Cecil Day-Lewis. What united these poets was not their largely ineffectual political attitudes but their fascination with the look and feel of modern Britain. (Literature's first television set appeared in Auden's work, in 1932.) One critic called them "communists with an intense love for England." In Auden, that love was particularly sensuous and direct. He produced huge vistas of England's mines and millscapes, and the jagged, deserted upper reaches of the northern Lake District—and he invested these scenes with a reverent, filial longing.

The counterpoint to this tender side in Auden's early poetry was a tone of laconic, sometimes portentous toughness. Like Kipling, he loved to preach and playfully hector. "Something is going to fall like rain /and it won't be flowers"; "Go down with your world that has had its day": Auden could reel off lines that reeked of threat and outrage. To a generation of young readers, dismayed by the economic conditions in their country and by the long slide of history toward the Second World War, Auden seemed to possess a communal voice, an imagination that was eerily in contact with their own hopes, fears, and resentments. The thirties was a time of weak political leadership in Britain, and an early phrase of Auden's about England—"this country of ours where nobody is well"—soon became a touchstone. As he became more famous, even his casual opinions were noted in gossip columns.

Auden was tall and thin, with a pale complexion and a cowlick of sandy hair that often fell over his brow ("the great big white barbarian" is how he imagined himself); his accent was plummy and Oxonian. He was often messily clothed: torn trousers, ragged tie, frayed or stained shirt cuffs and collar. (The economist John Maynard Keynes described him as "very dirty but a genius.") He smoked almost non-stop, and his nails were bitten down to the quick. Late in life, Auden would write, "The way he dresses / reveals an angry baby, / howling to be dressed."

He was relentlessly self-critical, partly, no doubt, as a result of the guilt programmed into homosexuals by British society. And yet his feelings of inferiority were tangled, overdetermined; sex was only a part of the configuration. On one occasion, he said that he felt embarrassed in the presence of anyone who was not in some respect his superior ("It may be a large cock, it may be sanctity"); indeed, for all his awareness of his own powers he thought of himself as clumsy, myopic, timid, sentimental, and overintellectual—a stranger to the world of physical sensations and strong feelings who, consequently, was obsessed by them.

FROM the summer of 1936, the year of Auden's second celebrated collection, "Look, Stranger!," until the winter of 1939, when he left England permanently, Auden was never at home for more than six months at a time. In those two and a half years, he became a compulsive wanderer, circling the globe with Isherwood and spending substantial amounts of time in Iceland, Belgium, Spain, and China. And even while his reputation soared in Britain (George VI himself presented Auden with the King's Gold Medal for Poetry in 1937) Auden's work, and his comments to his friends, had begun to take on a pessimistic, sardonic flavor. When *New Verse*, the most influential poetry magazine of the decade, published an "Auden Double Number," which was entirely devoted to pieces about Auden and his work, Auden contributed "Dover," a deliberately flat poem that offered an entropic picture of George VI's "Great" Britain. "All this show / Has, somewhere inland, a vague and dirty root," he declared. For all "the vows, the tears, the slight emotional signals" that have become routine here, England, he said coolly, has become "of minor importance." It was a calculated diminishment of his own poetic cult and of the country that had exalted him.

In reminiscences of Auden from these years, one often finds him sitting alone by a window brooding, or keeping ostentatiously silent in company. In mid-1938, Isherwood saw the poet who the year before had written a poem in praise of a one-night stand "in tears, telling me that no one would ever love him, that he would never have my sexual success." Auden had had boyfriends, of course, but, partly because he was usually attracted to teen-agers, had so far had no enduring love. Loveless, faithless, and successful, he was in the grip of a strange predicament. When he was abroad, he wrote brilliant poetry, and was often personally happy. When he was at home, he lectured and exhorted, his poetry grew brittle, and he was filled with a gloom bordering on despair. He spent most of his time in England living, like an overgrown simpleton, at his parents' house in Birmingham. "I felt that I had to make some kind of radical change, not knowing what it would be exactly," he told an interviewer late in life. "I would say that I felt the situation in England for me was becoming impossible. I couldn't grow up." Duty and responsibility kept drawing Auden back to England but, though he was writing prolifically, he felt that his sources of inspiration were drying up.

Around this time, Auden got a letter from a young poet who was sending him some poems. When Auden replied, he gave the young man some advice that he himself was having trouble following:

> Remember that another poet's work is not a pair of spectacles, but a key with which to unlock one's nature and find its unsuspected treasures. Ask yourself constantly and remorselessly "What am I really interested in?" "What do I know for myself?" "What, in fact, *are* my experiences?" And however boring or silly those experiences may seem at first sight, those and those only can be the subject matter of your poems. Make the fullest use you can of your *own* visual and emotional experiences.

IN January, 1939, Auden and Isherwood were on a French liner, the Champlain, as she labored westward. (The same ship, celebrated at the end of "Speak, Memory," would ferry Vladimir Nabokov and his family to the New World the following year, before she was sunk by a mine near Bordeaux.) In the midst of featureless North Atlantic waters, the two men found themselves shuffling off the coils of a decade's worth of public aspirations. They had reached a state of emotional exhaustion with the leftist rallies, the speeches, the petitions, the worried dinner-table discussions. " 'You know,' " Isherwood remembered telling his friend as they stood on deck, " 'it just doesn't mean anything to me anymore—the Popular Front, the party line, the anti-Fascist struggle. I suppose they're okay but something's wrong with me. I simply cannot swallow another mouthful.' To which Wystan answered, 'Neither can I.' "

The ship ran into a blizzard off Newfoundland and, Isherwood recalled, sailed into New York Harbor "looking like a wedding cake." On the morning of January 26, 1939, he and Auden stood on deck—tiny pristine bride and bridegroom figures perched high on the tiers of snow—and watched the skyline emerge, like a photographic print, out of a fresh storm. To Isherwood the image was a terrifying vision of "the Red Indian island with its appalling towers. . . . The Citadel—stark, vertical, gigantic, crammed with the millions who had already managed to struggle ashore and find a foothold." But for all its prestige as the center of an advanced civilization, Manhattan was still recognizably Whitman's "City of the sea! city of hurried and glittering tides!" There were cannons and steamship offices at the end of lower Broadway, and stores there where you could buy a sou'wester; the port's channels brimmed with a slew of vessels—ferries, barges, tugs, liners, and fishing boats.

Like most English people arriving in the city, Auden and Isherwood fell among the English. They moved into the George Washington Hotel, on

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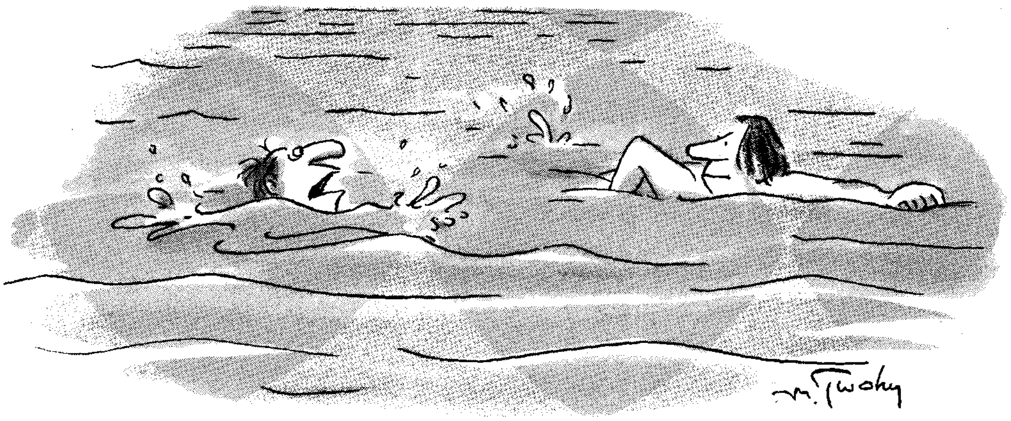

"Drowning. What's new with you?"

Lexington Avenue, an unfashionable edifice with an ornate, toffee-colored façade (it is still there, sagging among exercise studios and welfare hotels). The manager, Donald Neville-Willing, was a queeny English émigré who exulted in the news that he and Isherwood had mutual acquaintances in Cheshire. The results soon began to flow: special weekly rates, free late-night toddies, invitations to parties in Neville-Willing's sitting room.

Auden liked the George Washington so much that he eventually wrote a valedictory poem about it, and he explained to Benjamin Britten that New York itself was one "grand hotel" in a world so destabilized that everyone had become a traveller. A friend who went to see Auden one morning found him busy in his "cell-like room, puffing cigarettes amid suitcases, books, papers, old clothes and grounded wall-decorations." In this clutter, Auden set about extricating himself from his roots. Besides his elegy for Yeats, he composed memorial poems for the socialist playwright Ernst Toller, who hanged himself in the Barbizon Plaza Hotel, and for Sigmund Freud. Together, the subjects of these poems formed a trinity representing the secular ideologies of cure that he had toyed with throughout the thirties: visionary poetry, Marxist politics, and psychoanalysis. In prose, Auden soon added an elegy for his first master and "poetical father," Thomas Hardy.

For a few years, Auden had barely kept up with his own father. But in February of 1939 Auden got a letter from Dr. Auden which was mildly critical. In a recently discovered reply, now in the Bodleian Library, at Oxford, Auden argued back at length. "Sorry you didn't like the little poem in the New Statesman," he began, and he went on to provide answers to the accusations that would later be levelled against him by his English audience. To his father's Why? Auden responded with a Because:

> You say you would like to see me the mouthpiece of an epoch: so, of course, would I, but I want to explain to you what being a writer looks like from the inside. . . . Basically the writer's problem is that of everyone, how to go on growing the whole of his life, because to stop growing is to die. . . . Because the actions which express his growth, ie his writings, are public, there are peculiar temptations for a writer.
>
> 1. If he does something which is successful, the public want him to go on doing it. Now he often Can. When you say, for instance "I liked your work before you turned away from the Romantic," I know that I could quite easily go on turning out the kind of Romantic poetry I was doing, but it would be destruction for me to do it, however popularly successful it was. I don't say that my work then was worse than now. Very likely it was better; but to go on doing it when I feel different would be to be false to myself and to art.

As Auden foresaw, he was to suffer a lifetime of such reproaches. He went on:

> If he wants to be the mouthpiece of his age, as every writer does, it must be the last thing he thinks about. Tennyson for example *was* the Victorian mouthpiece in "In Memoriam" when he was thinking about Hallam and his grief. When he decided to be the Victorian Bard and wrote "Idylls of the King," he ceased to be a poet. . . .
>
> What an age is like is never what it thinks it is, which is why the best art of any period, the art which the future realizes to be the product of its time, is usually rather disliked when it appears.

The letter from Dr. Auden must have hit a nerve; Auden soon composed a poem about Matthew Arnold's dutiful and self-mortifying relationship with his headmaster father, the Victorian patriarch Thomas Arnold, and he inserted a third section into the elegy for Yeats, adding his famous and oracular definition of his art—"Poetry makes nothing happen." He wrote that poetry survives as "a way of happening, a mouth." It is a strange, almost erotic image: poetry was to be not a hard, impersonal artifact—the "mouthpiece" his father had spoken of—but the warm, vulnerable, yielding organ of song, speech, and love.

FOR a while, Auden continued to be tempted by his old English role, that of the political prophet. Then, in March, 1939, at a dinner at the Commodore Hotel to raise money for people who had fled from Franco's forces in Spain, he realized how terrifying and nihilistic the experience of prophetic power could be. He gave a talk on the significance of the Spanish conflict in which he castigated intellectuals for being "so damn conceited, selfish and lazy." What, he asked, is the real meaning of democracy? He answered himself with a burst of humanitarian boilerplate about decency and caring. And then he ended by envisaging the apocalyptic dissolution of his own class. He exhorted his listeners to behave more like democrats in their private lives. If we don't, he said, it will be "our own people who will say 'To hell with talk, to hell with truth, to hell with freedom,' will rise up and sweep us away, and by God, ladies and gentlemen, we shall deserve it." His listeners erupted.

Auden's initial reaction was a sense of exhilaration. The poet who a few years before had been guiltily aware of the gap between himself and his English admirers discovered an audience that he could feel transmitting a surge of ecstatic energy to him. He explained to a friend, "I suddenly found I could really do it, that I could make a fighting demagogic speech and have the audience roaring. And, my dear, it is so exciting but so absolutely degrading; I felt just covered with dirt afterwards." The contact high that Auden had intermittently sought from his audience throughout the thirties suddenly revealed itself to him as a demonic temptation.

When Auden asserted in his Yeats elegy that poetry makes nothing happen, part of what he wanted to convey was that, in a world so full of active evil, he *hoped* that poetry—especially his own—was not responsible for making anything happen. "Never, *never* again," he swore to a friend, "will I speak at a political meeting." In fact, Auden's comments at his next major public appearance in New York, a month later, were an almost explicit refutation of the Commodore Hotel speech. He and Isherwood were booked to participate in a reading on "Modern Trends in English Poetry and Prose" at a social club called the Keynote, in midtown, run by the Marxist-dominated League of American Writers. The writer Selden Rodman, who was a member of the audience that night, wrote in his journal that Auden's first words came as "a bombshell." The famous left-wing poet opened with his new aesthetic creed:

> I don't want there to be any mistake about the responsibilities of the writer or the limitations of art. Two hundred years from now nobody will care much about our politics. But if we were truly moved by the things that happened to us, they may read our poems. In his time Dante was a reactionary. It is also deplorable that Yeats' last poem calls for war. But because Yeats was one of those most rare writers who continued to be moved by what happened to him right up to the day he died, his work will always have that authentic ring we recognize as poetry.

After Auden, Isherwood, and Louis MacNeice took turns reading, there was a beer-and-pretzels party, at which Auden and Isherwood met a fleshy blond undergraduate, Chester Kallman, and his boyfriend, Harold Norse. "Our first impressions of Auden, slovenly in rumpled tweed, were of disbelief," Norse remembered. "His shirt was unpressed, heavy woolen socks bunched limply around his thick ankles, and untied shoelaces flopped over his shoes." When he got a chance, however, Norse edged his way over and introduced

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himself to Isherwood, who gave him a card with the address of the apartment that he and Auden were renting.

When Kallman turned up at the flat two days later, Auden was disappointed. "It's the wrong blond!" he whispered to Isherwood. But Auden, who had been instructing his audiences in the necessity of "being interested in your fellow human beings not as 'subjects for reform' but as equal human beings," was ready for something to fill the hole left by the collapse of his political ideals. Kallman proved to be an adept (and funny) conversationalist, as well as a desirable sexual trophy. He stayed to tea and came back a couple of days later. By the beginning of June, Auden wrote to his brother, "It's really happened at last after all these years. Mr Right has come into my life. He is a Roumanian-Latvian-American Jew called Chester Kallman. . . . This time, my dear, I really believe it's marriage."

Auden told another friend that he was "mad with happiness"—and insecurity. A few years later, he explained, "I never really loved anyone before, and then when he got through the wall, he became so much part of my life that I keep forgetting that he is a separate person, and having discovered love, I have also discovered what I never knew before, the dread of being abandoned and left alone." Kallman's reactions were divided. He was exhilarated by the affair at first ("Auden is in *love* with me!" he crowed to Norse), but he was only eighteen, and almost straightaway his eyes started to wander. Even on their "honeymoon" trip ("honeymoon" was Auden's term; "*Such* a romantic girl" was Kallman's comment) to the Southwest in the summer of 1939, Kallman wrote to Norse that he "almost precipitated a domestic crisis by groping a boy sitting next to me between Jacksonville and Tallahassee. . . . Wystan was quite rightly exasperated."

While Kallman delighted in his emotional hold on Auden, he was intimidated by Auden's literary powers. Staying at a ranch outside Taos, Auden worked at his prose and Kallman, who had literary ambitions of his own, tried to write poetry. But he complained that his efforts were subjected to ruthless scrutiny: "Wystan reads them like a foreman and god I suffer under that clinical gaze. . . . He hardly approves at all, except for lines here and there—and almost never the ones *I* liked."

Kallman's sense of the distance between his own efforts and Auden's rapidly increased: Auden wanted to devote himself to Kallman; Kallman wanted to absorb Auden's talent. In a notebook of Kallman's dating from 1939 or 1940, there is a page covered by false starts—more writhing than writing. One quatrain has a callow, gloomy pathos:

Upon the porch my inspiration ceases
But upstairs Wystan paces
Like a horse before it races
Intoning one by one his quickie
    masterpieces.

As Auden and Kallman headed back East from their honeymoon, the political realities of 1939 became inescapable. Sitting in a railway carriage in the middle of Kansas at the end of August, Auden wrote to a friend, "There is a radio in this coach so that every hour or so, one has a violent pain in one's stomach as the news comes on." He arrived in New York just in time for Europe's descent into the maelstrom. Hitler invaded Poland on September 1, 1939, and that night Auden went, apparently alone, to a place called the Dizzy Club, on West Fifty-second Street. It was probably there, in the noisy bar—"packed to the rafters with college boys and working-class youths" is how Norse described it—that Auden began one of his most famous poems, "September 1, 1939." It was another elegy, this time a farewell to his generation's "clever hopes," aspirations that he had in part been responsible for molding. The thirties had been called "the Age of Auden"; now Auden himself wrote off the entire "low dishonest decade." Yet, oddly, given that this is one of Auden's most sombre poems, the opening cadence is borrowed from one of America's great comic poets, Ogden Nash. Auden, in his early months in the States, had self-consciously searched for American local styles, and had written to a friend about his discovery of Nash's idiom, misquoting from the poem "Spring Comes to Murray Hill": "As I sit in my office / On 23rd Street and Madison Avenue." Auden's new poem begins, "I sit in one of the dives / On Fifty-Second Street."

But Nash's equable comic accent is drowned out by a more strident rhetoric as the American bar scene gives way to the supercharged power of global indictment:

Into this neutral air
Where blind skyscrapers use
Their full height to proclaim
The strength of Collective Man,
Each language pours its vain
Competitive excuse:
But who can live for long
In an euphoric dream;
Out of the mirror they stare,
Imperialism's face
And the international wrong.

Auden wrote the poem over a weekend, but he would spend a good part of the rest of his life regretting it. He soon came to loathe what he felt was its sanctimoniousness and (as he saw it) the frivolity of its famous assertion that "we must love one another or die." In a letter to a friend who had admitted that she found it memorable, he fumed, "The reason (artistic) I left England and went to the U.S. was precisely to *stop* me writing poems like 'Sept 1st, 1939' the most dishonest poem I have ever written. A hang-over from the U.K. It takes time to cure oneself."

But poems, like children, defy their creators. Auden later made dogged attempts to extirpate "September 1, 1939" from his canon, but it has become one of his most quoted works. You can see why Auden was dissatisfied. After presenting a despairing picture of individual isolation, Auden asks portentously:

Who can release them now,
Who can reach the deaf,
Who can speak for the dumb?

There is no explicit answer, but the implication is that it is the poet who can restore contact and community to the lonely and the self-immured. Yet, in spite of this remorseless self-elevation, "September 1, 1939" continues to be an important poem. Not since Andrew Marvell's "Horatian Ode" had a poet made equivocation and doubt in the face of a major political event seem so representative a condition. As a piece of emotional reportage, Auden's threnody is a perfect register of the strangely muted onset of the century's worst event, and as long as we read poems for what they describe as well as for what they diagnose, it will remain one of the century's key lyrics.

The final, harsh epiphany of Auden's first year in the States occurred in early December, in a movie

CONTACT PRESS IMAGES

THOSE MANHATTAN NIGHTS *"Woman and Cigarette Holder" (1955), from an exhibition of photographs by William Klein, at the Howard Greenberg gallery, from March 29th to May 11th.*

theatre in Yorkville, a predominantly German neighborhood on the Upper East Side and a stronghold of both Nazi and anti-Nazi activism. Throughout the year, Auden had been drawing parallels between the power of the poet and the power of the dictator ("The Dictator who says 'My People': the Writer who says 'My Public,' " he scribbled in a bitter comment), and in Yorkville he saw a dynamic illustration of the state of violence that a dictator could whip up in an audience.

Among the films showing that day was a newsreel accompaniment to a sappy German comedy, "Das Ekel." The headquarters of the local Nazi *Bund* was above the cinema and, as Auden later told his old tutor Nevill Coghill, who asked him why he became a Christian, "Every time a Pole appeared on the screen, the audience shouted, 'Kill him!' What was remarkable about the film was the lack of hypocrisy. Every value I had been brought up on, and assumed everybody held, was flatly denied. I was forced to ask myself: 'If I think their values are wrong, what basic reason can I give?' "

A reviewer for the *Post* (at that time a liberal paper) was struck by the same thing as Auden. He reported in his column that, after a melee of shots from the battlefield, "there was a picture of Hitler reviewing his troops." Then, "As the solid blocks of soldiers marched past, goose-stepping almost off the ground . . . the 86th Street Garden Theatre burst into sudden and violent applause."

In a review Auden wrote shortly afterward he excoriated the contemporary world for "an ecstatic and morbid abdication of the free-willing and individual before the collective and the daemonic." He went on, "We have become obscene night worshipers who, having discovered that we cannot live exactly as we will, deny the possibility of willing anything and are content masochistically *to be lived.*" Within a few months, though, Auden had "willed" a momentous decision: in downtown Brooklyn, he took out the first set of papers necessary to change nationalities. In a draft of a poem he was working on at the time, he wrote, " 'England,' 'La France,' 'Das Reich,' their words, / Are like the names of extinct birds."

"NINETEEN THIRTY-NINE was a very decisive year for me," Auden told an acquaintance on the first day of 1940. He had begun the transition from subject to citizen, from liberal progressive to orthodox Episcopalian believer. (In the fall of 1940, he tentatively started to go to church again, in Brooklyn Heights.) Little more than a year before, Isherwood had heard Auden complaining that no one would ever love him. But now, in his new collection, he wrote of surveying the Manhattan harbor "with a lover's eyes." And yet his happiness was short-lived. Since the first summer of their relationship, Kallman had been unfaithful, and in July of 1941 there was a showdown during which Kallman told Auden that he had taken another lover, and that he would never sleep with Auden again. (That seems to have been the one vow in life which Kallman actually kept.)

For a while, Auden went to pieces—weeping, raging, even contemplating violence against Kallman and his new lover. After one savage row, Kallman woke up to find Auden's nicotine-stained fingers squeezing his throat. Auden quickly relented as Kallman pushed him away, and, though they were to live together on and off for the rest of their lives, their now sexless relationship was never free of emotional and practical tensions. Auden tried to persuade himself that he was grateful for the torments; as he explained to a friend in January of 1942, Kallman "makes me suffer and commit follies, without which I should soon become like the later Tennyson."

In fact, by 1942 Auden was very far from being treated like the Victorian Poet Laureate by anyone in his old country. In February of 1940, Cyril Connolly, for instance, had written silkily of two "far-sighted and ambitious young men with a strong instinct of self-preservation, and an eye on the main chance, who have abandoned what they consider to be the sinking ship of European democracy." And Auden was attacked by the right wing as ferociously as he was decried by his old left-wing friends. The week before his new book of poems, "Another Time," was published, during the period of the Battle of Britain, a Tory M.P. asked questions about Auden and Isherwood in Parliament, demanding to know whether they would be recalled for armed service. (Both had offered to return to Britain, but the government had told them to stay where they were.)

The assaults continued throughout the war. And shortly afterward the august Sir Desmond MacCarthy described Auden and Isherwood as "leaders of the young, champions of the oppressed, beacons of the future, thinkers, who, when civilisation and their fellow-countrymen were in danger, promptly left for Hollywood!"

The resentment, for some, remained intense even after the war began to fade into history. In 1955, the poet John Wain wrote that for a young poet "the Auden line" was no use after the war: "It was worn out even before it got smashed, and what smashed it decisively was not the war, but Auden's renunciation of English nationality." And in 1960 Philip Larkin declared that Auden had "lost his key subject and emotion . . . and abandoned his audience together with their common dialect and concerns."

Larkin was right—Auden *had* abandoned his bond with his English audience. It was a decision that he never regretted. After moving around the States for several years in the wake of the crisis with Kallman, Auden made his home in Manhattan, until the very final years of his life. Like Yeats, he had "remade" himself; and he went on doing so throughout his life. "Who am I now?" he asked in a poem in 1967, called, defiantly, "Prologue at Sixty." His answer suggested that while he had given up his English nationality, he had not become an American. He defined himself instead as a citizen of a polyglot world of transients; he wrote that he was "a New Yorker."

EVEN as Auden endured the jeremiads launched at him and his work, there is no evidence that he ever felt that he was anywhere but at the center of his era. It was almost as if he suffered while he was still alive the decline in interest that hits most writers only after they die. Now, though, his status is higher than it has been for more than fifty years. Since his death, his words have been "scattered among a hundred cities," sometimes in ways that would have dismayed him. At least four of the past seven Presidents (Johnson, Reagan, Bush, and Clinton) have quoted Auden publicly to drive home political points. And the recent resurgence of his reputation has carried him beyond the confines of the merely "literary" audience. A couple of years ago, a pamphlet of Auden poems, "Tell Me the Truth About Love," sold over two hundred thousand copies in Britain.

At first glance, the rise in Auden's stock makes sense. The qualities once singled out by hostile critics—his un-English fondness for philosophical theory, his religiousness, his homosexuality, his fascination with the marginal and the neglected, his rootlessness—now look eerily contemporary. But some of Auden's coolly skeptical qualities are being forgotten or glossed over, and the old, approachable communal bard of the thirties is again in the ascendant. This adds up to a limited notion of his significance. Auden wrote some of his greatest verse after he emigrated—vivid poetry full of slang and archaism, which stands at a slight angle to the world of the "normal" and the "natural" so as to cut into our everyday pieties.

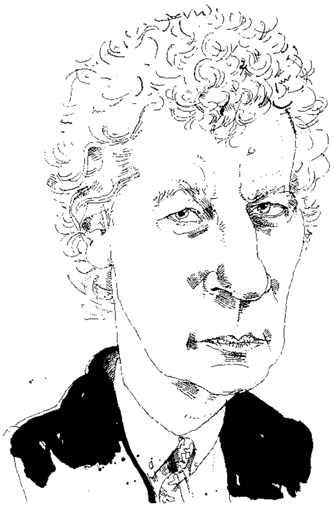
But these are literary issues on which one can agree or disagree. The lasting significance of Auden's decision to emigrate to the United States is not the insoluble calculus of whether he would have written better had he stayed at home. After all, many writers stay put and slump disastrously. The main point about Auden's departure is simply that he left. And, in leaving, he did perhaps more than anyone else ever has to extend the horizon for British writers. He made it possible—made it mandatory, in fact—to conceive of a literary map on which London was not at the center of the world; he defined cultural allegiances as something provisional and chosen; he gave a faint but indelible italic slant to the word "*home*." It wasn't a particular place, Auden wrote riddlingly in 1942. Instead, home was

> A sort of honour, not a building site,
> Wherever we are, when, if we chose, we might
> Be somewhere else, yet trust that we have
> chosen right. ♦

FLAUBERT IN THE TRENCHES

Exploring the netherworld of the First World War.

BY SIMON SCHAMA



Sebastian Faulks

THIRTY thousand British soldiers were killed or wounded in the first thirty minutes of the Battle of the Somme, on the morning of July 1, 1916. By the end of the day, half of the hundred and twenty thousand who had clambered out of the trenches were lying dead or gravely wounded. Over the next five months, the fighting at the Somme and at Verdun consumed nearly a million lives. Men perished at the rate of two hundred and seventy-seven an hour—nearly five men every minute.

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nage lay not with a clearly identifiable party of evil but with humanity itself. To the greatest battlefield poets, among them Isaac Rosenberg, Siegfried Sassoon, and Wilfred Owen, the hideous proximity of cheerfulness and carnage, of the grin and the rictus, was a shock as bad as anything delivered by the shrapnel.

When someone asks Stephen Wraysford, the gaunt British lieutenant at the center of Sebastian Faulks's overpowering and beautiful novel "Birdsong" (Random House; $25), how he maintains his galling self-possession, he replies that it's curiosity that keeps him going—a fascination to see just how much can be inflicted, how much can be taken, and what the face of extremity really looks like. Readers of "Birdsong" will find out in intricate, terrifying detail just what it looked like. In these pages, war's grim visage has empty sockets where the eyes have been eaten by rats and a mouth crammed with exploded blue clay. But the power of Faulks's novel (his fourth) comes as much from its intensely physical realization of life, and especially sensual life, as from its evocation of death. Unlike other novels of the Great War, such as Remarque's "All Quiet on the Western Front," where the prelude to catastrophe is the oompah enthusiasm of naïvely patriotic volunteers, Faulks's begins with a peacetime trauma as overwhelming as anything to be later found in battle. It takes place, moreover, in the same gray country of Picardy that will soon crumble into the landscape of apocalypse. In 1910, Stephen Wraysford, a young businessman with no family, is sent to Amiens by his textile company to learn something of French manufacturing, and there, despite all his orphan's bleak caution, he plunges into a fierce affair with his host's young wife, Isabelle. They flee south. Happiness eludes them. Without explanation, Isabelle disappears, and Stephen, his sole connection to vital self-awareness broken, goes cold. Four years later, he lines up for khaki and the gas mask.

Faulks does not stop at the lip of the trenches, or even on their mud-slurry floor. He dives into the bowels of the earth, forty feet below the surface, where special Tunnelling Companies have dug primitive tunnels hundreds of yards long to reach below the enemy lines and plant devastating mines. These gas-filled galleries of death—they can just as easily bury the miners in a living tomb as wreak havoc on their foes—become a metaphor for the futility of the conflict: the habitat of men-moles, blinking and scrabbling at the earth that will become their grave. But in Faulks's exact and unsparing prose, full of conscientiously gathered technical detail, the netherworld of the war becomes a believable—or, rather, mind-bogglingly unbelievable—habitat, with its diggers supported by wooden crosses. The toiling men drag in precious, thin drafts of air, and press their ears to the earth wall, listening for the sound of German moles scuttling above or below in their parallel tunnels.

Though Faulks's soldiers are stripped down to the elemental qualities needed for survival, they are never mere stereotypes, Tommy buddies bonded in darkness and terror. Their behavior is as unpredictable and volatile as their weapons. Stupid with exhaustion, Stephen threatens to court-martial a private for sleeping on sentry duty but just as abruptly drops the charge. Driven by his fascination with the varieties of hell, he takes a squad of men below to act as infantry backup for the tunnellers. Without quite meaning to, he befriends Michael Weir, the repressed, edgy captain in charge of the moles, who survives on Stephen's supply of whiskey and is held together by Stephen's dark, muscular rage. Faulks has perfect pitch when it comes to recovering the voices of both officers and enlisted men. Jack Firebrace, a mole who learned his trade cutting the tunnels for the London Underground, writes to his wife, Margaret, in the half-merry, half-mournful, tea-soaked prose of the stoical Cockney. Before a bombardment of the German defenses, Colonel Gray, the Scottish officer in charge of getting men over the top for the "Big Push" of 1916, listens to a gung-ho officer's boast that "if there's any Boche left alive after that he'll be so bloody relieved it's over that he'll come out with his hands up," and replies, with mock gratitude, "That would certainly constitute an unexpected bonus."

Faulks is as convincing in scenes that take place on the outer rim of death—in small-town estaminets a few miles from the front; in squalid cottages where mothers and daughters service the soldiers; in dreary Amiens itself, scarred by shell fire and the little betrayals of a brief German occupation—as he is inside the craters of destruction. In Amiens, where zinc-top bars are crowded with smooth-shaved young men on leave who, just the day before, were "waist-deep in mud, crawling among the rats," Stephen runs into Isabelle's sister, Jeanne, and then meets his old love again. In a lamplit room, he discovers that she, too, has become a casualty of war, within and without. Back at the Flanders front in 1918, with most of the tunnels empty, Stephen joins the miners for a last, nervous reconnaissance. In short order, it turns into the most harrowing test yet.

Faulks, whether he's offering us pleasure or pain, has a gift for acutely focussed visual observation. In an early passage, Stephen, compulsively absorbed in everything Isabelle does, notices that her lips leave no trace on her wineglass, even when "some tiny adhesion caused the membrane of her lower lip to linger for a fraction of a second as she pulled the glass away to return it to its place." His tactile sense is equally startling, conveying the touch of a nurse, a lover, or a comrade along the edges of flesh suddenly opened by desire or by explosives. And it's this commitment to clinical precision—he is Flaubert in the trenches—that makes his measured excursions into the realm of pure emotion so telling. Like that greatest of all the French masters, Faulks understands that a dispassionate eye is the condition of a compassionate intelligence. Stephen, recovering in a hospital from wounds received in an underground blast, watches a nurse tending a young soldier who has been hideously damaged by chlorine gas and flayed by burns:

> On the third morning the boy's voice came back to him. He begged to die.
>
> The nurse had left the screens slightly apart and Stephen saw her lift the tent away with great care, holding it high above the scorched body before she turned and laid it on the floor. She looked down at the flesh no one was allowed to touch, from the discharging eyes, down over the face and neck, the raw chest, the groin and throbbing legs. Impotently, she held both her arms wide in a gesture of motherly love, as though this would comfort him.

One of the book's few faults is its title, a symptom of Faulks's penchant for avian symbols—crows, larks, canaries—that flap and twitter at significant moments of the narrative. Ambitious, outrageous, poignant, sleep-disturbing, "Birdsong" is not a perfect novel—just a great one. ◆

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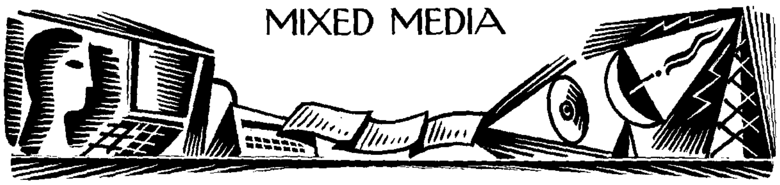
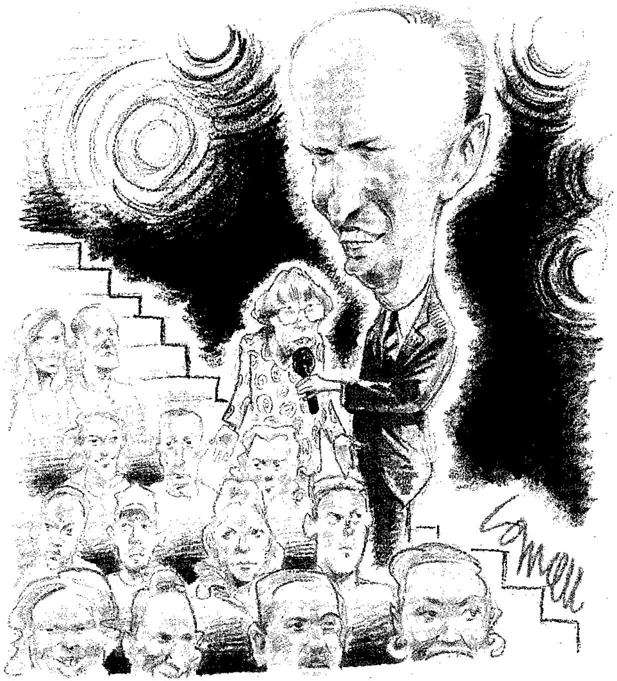


TALKING TRASH

A sendup of talk shows argues that good TV and virtue don't mix.

BY JAMES WOLCOTT

AT first, the furor over “trash TV” (those daytime talk shows hosted by Ricki Lake, Geraldo Rivera, Richard Bey, Jerry Springer, Jenny Jones, Sally Jessy Raphael, Maury Povich, Montel Williams, and the others vying for Oprah’s throne) divided along ideological lines, like a “Crossfire” panel. On the right, wearing a gray suit and a grumpy expression, was William Bennett, the former Secretary of Education and “drug czar,” the author of the best-seller “The Book of Virtues,” and the co-director (with Jack Kemp) of Empower America. Having weighed in against gangsta rap, Bennett called a press conference in which he condemned daytime talk shows as degrading spectacles and specimens of “cultural rot,” which fostered promiscuity and other forms of bad posture. His “J’accuse” was seconded by Republicans ranging from Colin Powell to Bruce Willis, with moderate Democrats such as Senators Sam Nunn and Joseph Lieberman making worried noises as well. On the left, pundits beseeched us to look beyond the tawdry theatrics (e.g., black girls calling each other ho’s) and pay heed to the Underlying Social Issues. The *Times* columnist Frank Rich chastised Bennett for not being equally indignant about the tobacco giants, such as Philip Morris, that sponsor these programs (through their food divisions). In *Time*, Barbara Ehrenreich claimed that economic deprivation sometimes drove talk-show guests to shame themselves, and that the backlash against trash TV was an attempt to neuter the working class—a position also adopted by Ellen Willis in *The Nation*. She wrote, “On talk shows, whatever their drawbacks, the proles get to talk.”



A one-man anthology of talk-show insincerity: Timothy Stack as the imaginary host of the satirical “Night Stand.”

DAVID SMALL

And not just proles. A contributor to the liberal policy-wonk bimonthly *The American Prospect* saluted daytime talk for providing a forum where transvestites and other sexual outsiders could dress up and say their piece, thus subverting their status as deviant Other. But the clean split between conservative “valuecrats” and liberal pop-culturati became a ball of confusion when one of Rich’s colleagues at the *Times* Op-Ed page, Bob Herbert, tore into Sally Jessy Raphael twice for using her program to pillory teen-age girls as “sluts.” Sounding as indignant as William Bennett, Herbert compared her shows to child porn—“a form of ritualized, legalized child abuse.” His on-

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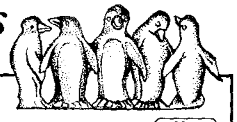

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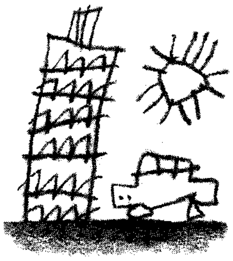
slaught froze the reflexes of the defenders of trash TV. It's easy to take pokes at Bennett's busybody pomposity; Herbert, however, is a gutsy black journalist with no cultural pretensions, who was conveying genuine revulsion. His columns couldn't be dismissed as a power play.

Meanwhile, TV has its own methods of policing itself. It chews its excesses and spits them out like bubble gum. The sharpest, funniest, and sanest critique of trash TV is a satire called "Night Stand" (syndicated nationally, and shown locally Saturday nights on WWOR-Channel 9), an imaginary talk show hosted by Dick Dietrick, played by Timothy Stack. Unlike E!'s popular series "Talk Soup," which serves tacky clips from talk shows in bite-size McNuggets, "Night Stand," created by Stack, Paul Abeyta, and Peter Kaikko, doesn't peer through a porthole of smug irony. It presents sleaze and corruption as viable life-style alternatives. The program is taped in Los Angeles before a studio audience, with professional actors cast as the dysfunctional guests, and has become a cult favorite among standup comics and others with keen antennae. (Bill Maher, the host of "Politically Incorrect," has called it "the funniest show on TV.") Each hour-long show consists of two segments, featuring such burning non-issues as "So You Think You're a Lesbian?" and "Addicted to Strip Clubs"; guests are I.D.'d onscreen with punchy tags ("BETH ANN MCCLEAR—Sexually Abused Christian Author/Centerfold"). The show also employs the guerrilla tactics of trash TV—the ambush interview, the hidden camera, the inciting of catfights—and it captures the kangaroo-court, revival-tent ritualism of that realm, where bad guys are booed, sinners repent, and souls are healed.



Yet no one would mistake "Night Stand" for a real talk show. Its healthy sparkle is pure Hollywood. Unlike the human driftwood on daytime talk shows, the men and women on "Night Stand" are tan and buff, a master race of test-tube babies that didn't turn out so smart. These lap dancers, defrocked ministers, and shopaholics all speak as if they had attended self-help seminars, showing big rows of perfect teeth as they discuss the demons that possess them. The show's put-on humor is somewhere between the old Steve Allen show and "Fernwood 2-Night," with double-entendres that Benny Hill might have happily squirrelled away.

What lends "Night Stand" its touch of the idiot sublime is Stack's characterization of Dick Dietrick. He has a limber quality all his own, a guarded yet elastic self-deprecation reminiscent of George Plimpton's early writing or of Dick Martin rocking back on his heels on "Laugh-In." Lanky, boneless, pseudo-debonair, Stack's Dietrick is a one-man anthology of talk-show insincerity; the studio is his used-car lot, loaded with lemons. He can switch with seamless ease from badgering his guests to offering sympathy. He opens each segment with a brief topic intro, intoned with the news-bulletin urgency of Ted Koppel. On a recent "Night Stand," the case of a white stripper losing a job to a black stripper raised the issue of affirmative action. "For those of you not familiar with affirmative action," Dick explained, "it's a government program originally set up to give minorities jobs that white people didn't want. Well, things are different now, white people have changed their minds, and they want those jobs back." As the show proceeds, Dick uses his body English to keep the dialogue in play: he fans his hand after he releases a tricky question, like a magician casting a spell, then does a Phil Donahue slouch as he awaits the answer; he snaps his fingers over his head, Sally Jessy Raphael style, to chastise his audience for hearing a dirty message in his innocent questions. ("Oh, *no*, no, people, no!")

Dietrick's professional aplomb is undercut by his verbal haplessness. He is subject to malapropisms ("Let's cut to the heart of the meat of the matter") and has a spotty sense of history, referring to "the late Paul McCartney," to "the day Elvis was shot," and to events "indelibly paper-clipped" in the mind. With his female guests, he often drifts off into erotic reverie: "So anyway you're in bed, probably in pajamas or a nightgown or a peekaboo teddy that rides high over your graceful yet powerful hips. Then what happened?" Yet at the end of each segment he pulls himself together and addresses a sermonette to the camera (a takeoff on Jerry Springer): "So, what have we learned about fame? Well, we've learned that fame is usually limited to the well-known. . . . You see, people are always watching you when you're famous. And as a result things you take for granted are hardships for people like me. For example, I can't buy Preparation H without people gawking at me. I can't stiff a waiter. I can't hang around a Catholic girls' school waiting for that three-o'clock bell."

Snatches of autobiography sneak into each episode of "Night Stand": Dick's busted marriage and alimony payments. His bachelor life at Casa de Tuna, where he has been accused of nude bathing on the patio. His thing for white cotton panties ("the land of cotton"). His late nights alone with his remote-control clicker. In his sports jackets and loafers, Dietrick is the Sears-catalogue model of a classic underachiever. When one of his guests accuses him of being a third-rate talk-show host, he snaps, "I'll have you know I'm a *second*-rate talk-show host!" His proud, defensive second-rateness is what makes him a symptomatic American loser. He's the quintessential white guy who can't dance but snaps his fingers extra hard, a throwback to the "What kind of man reads *Playboy*?" ad, swirling a drink in a goblet beneath a black velvet bullfight painting. It's a persona that might be too dank and pathetic to enjoy if Stack didn't invest the role with such dry geniality.

"Night Stand," like such recent pieces of pop sociology as "To Die For" and "Natural Born Killers," portrays the TV audience as a nation of trained seals—fame junkies who clap on cue and crane their necks to see themselves on the studio monitors. There's no quality filter to celebrity today: serial killers and opera singers occupy the same glittery plane. On "Night Stand," sitcom has-beens are hurrahed like Oscar winners, and even an attractive woman who appears only in the background of infomercials is treated like a star. ("Julianne, welcome to the show. I can see by the looks on the people in the audience that they almost recognize you.") In "To Die For" and "Natural Born Killers" the mass appetite for celebrity and notoriety is diagnosed as a national soul malady, but "Night Stand" doesn't trouble its empty little head over such matters. Like *Mad* magazine, it takes pop-culture garbage as a given—something beyond reform or redemption and full of absurd goodies. It assumes that all Americans crave the same thing: cheap attention. After a religious groupie recounts to Dick how she decided to cash in on her notoriety, getting herself an agent and a new body, then posing naked everywhere she could ("It did wonders for my self-esteem"), he exclaims, "What a positive person!"

In the world according to Dick, the only categorical imperative is to create good TV. Good TV means embarrassment ("Let's dredge up the heartache and trauma of that moment, if you don't mind") and conflict, no matter how contrived. When a gossip columnist announced that he was collaborating with a former maid to detail her exploitation at the hands of the former sitcom star Cindy Williams, Dick said, "I think writing a book is good therapy, but facing your demons is good television." (Enter a scowling Cindy Williams.) And when a beauty-pageant consultant tried to play peacemaker between two beauty queens, Dick pointed a finger and issued a stern rebuke: "Don't *ever* stop a fight on my show."

A RECENT column by Frank Rich dismissed Bennett's jawbone campaign against trash TV as "ineffectual." Rich is mistaken. Trash TV is less trashy since Bennett let blow. Under pressure from advertisers, most of the surviving daytime talk shows have toned down their zoo antics and adopted a more healing mode, with caring-sharing hugs all around. But if Bennett is the technical victor in this battle, neither side could be said to have distinguished itself. Right and left alike have exploited the trash-TV phenomenon for their own ends. The right used trash TV to occupy a moral high ground that they vacated the moment they got bored. (Valuecrats have shifted their attention to racy sitcoms such as "Seinfeld" and "Friends," a cleanup campaign I boldly predict will go *nowhere*.) Bob Herbert aside, the left used trash TV to pose as the defenders of the downtrodden by arguing that the domestic squabblers on daytime talk represent the authentic voice of the working class—even though it has been documented that these shows are plagued with impostors and deadbeats hired through classified ads. (The real working class is out working.) With both sides platitudinizing, Timothy Stack's Dick Dietrick emerges as the only honest phony around. And "Night Stand" is further evidence that in the nineties comedy is the only place where anyone can be both truthful and silly about race, sex, and class. Everything else is editorial. ♦

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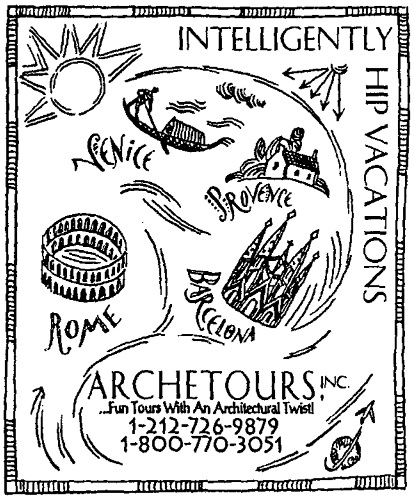

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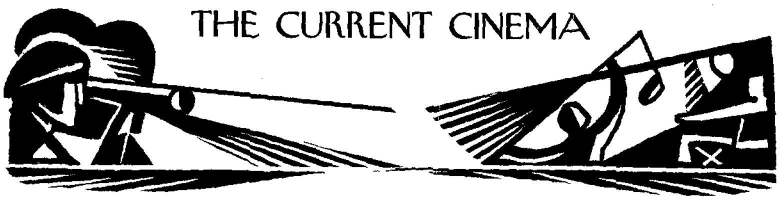


SISTERS AND BROTHERS

"Diabolique" redux, and "A Family Thing."

BY TERRENCE RAFFERTY

ANOTHER week, another Hollywood remake of a French movie. Hard on the high heels of the current box-office queen, "The Birdcage," comes Jeremiah Chechik's "Diabolique," a glossy American version of Henri-Georges Clouzot's 1954 thriller. Since the surprise hit of the Christmas season, "Twelve Monkeys," was also based on a French film (Chris Marker's "La Jetée"), pessimistic moviegoers may sense a trend in the making. Will the studio production heads now be looking, say, to revive the flagging career of Macaulay Culkin by retooling "The 400 Blows" as "Home Alone 3," or to give the Disney animation team a crack at Cocteau's "Orpheus"?

The good news about the American "Diabolique" is that it's unlikely to repeat the success of "Twelve Monkeys" and "The Birdcage," and so may slightly dampen Hollywood's enthusiasm for Franco-American hybridization experiments. "Diabolique" is the story of an unusual murder conspiracy, in which a man's wife and his mistress join forces to do him in; the tone of the original is icy, clinical, and amoral, drawing us into a kind of uneasy complicity with the killers. Chechik and his screenwriter, Don Roos, perhaps sensing that contemporary multiplex viewers might demand more stimulation than the genteel subtitle readers of the fifties did, make the mistake of trying to add American spice to this chilled French dish, and the result is a hilariously awful concoction, like vichyssoise sprinkled with jalapeños.

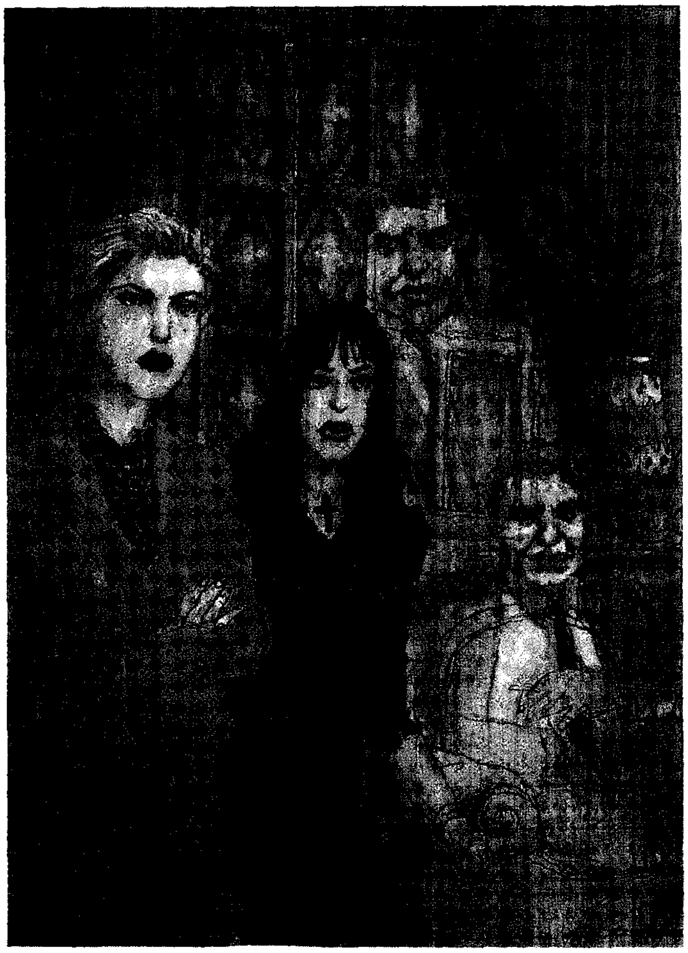
Most of the movie's heat is meant to be supplied by Sharon Stone, who plays the intended victim's disgruntled mistress. This character, Nicole, is worldlier and more self-possessed than her partner in crime—Mia (Isabelle Adjani), a timid ex-nun married to a bully named Guy (Chazz Palminteri). The women teach at a Pennsylvania prep school run by the odious Guy, who treats Nicole and Mia as his personal harem. Mia has endured his abuse because she's weak; she's literally fainthearted—prone to coronary attacks at moments of stress. Nicole's compliance is harder to figure out. It's difficult to imagine this spectacular woman being dominated by a mere macho creep, and the movie doesn't encourage us to ponder that mystery: when the story begins, the women are already planning Guy's demise, and we see Nicole primarily as a cunning, strong-willed avenger, engineering her lover's murder. The role of Nicole—played by Simone Signoret in the original—seems ideal for Stone: a natural extension of the killer-sexpot persona she created in "Basic Instinct." But, although "Diabolique" is obviously designed to be her show, it winds up turning her into camp.

Sharon Stone, as many have noted, is a kind of throwback to the glamorous Hollywood stars of the studio era: she smolders, therefore she is. But her bombshellhood is laced with postmodern self-awareness, and no current star uses irony more exuberantly. Stone is all sharp edges, brittle wit, and cool come-on, and she never tries to win the audience over with high-minded sincerity. Her acting is daringly stylized, constantly poised on the brink of self-parody; "Diabolique" pushes her over the cliff. Chechik, unwisely, exaggerates her anachronistic qualities by decking her out in retro fifties fashions: snug little sweaters, curve-emphasizing suits, and seamed stockings. And, like the femmes fatales of yore, she's rarely without a cigarette. (Her nicotine habit serves two distinct and worthy functions: first, she's able to blow smoke in the face of anyone who annoys her; second, her deep inhales give her countless opportunities to test the already overtaxed fabric of her outfits.) At the movie's peak of self-consciousness, Nicole snatches an unlit cigarette from the lips of mousy Mia and mutters, "Oh, come on—you can't pull that off."

For a while, it's fun to watch Sharon Stone bestowing her full Sharon Stoneness on the unsuspecting denizens of a boys' prep school. She sashays through the shabby classrooms and the peaceful grounds like a pissed-off queen in exile. The script provides her with plenty of jaded zingers to deliver, and she hisses them out with expert disdain. Her presence is absurdly more vivid than that of either Palminteri or Adjani: both of them play their scenes in conventional melodramatic style, as if they were in a USA Network potboiler—he leers, she opens her eyes really wide. In the middle of this dull, familiar landscape, there's Stone, vamping in toreador pants like a bad girl in a John Waters movie: inevitably, she makes an impression, and, just as inevitably, she becomes ridiculous.

The way Stone is used in "Diabolique" implies that an American actress can't hope to match the womanly assurance of a European like Signoret—that a wised-up, sexually confident American woman is some kind of freak. Obviously, that's not what the filmmakers, or Stone, meant to suggest. In fact, the script alters the original story to make it seem more "feminist": Nicole and Mia are turned into noirish versions of Thelma and Louise, achieving sisterhood in revenge. (Clouzot's movie is far more cynical about the bond between the women.) The sole benefit of this raised-consciousness opportunism is that it provides a role for Kathy Bates, who enters the movie halfway through, in a part played by a man (Charles Vanel) in the original: she's the deceptively mild-mannered detective who solves the mystery. This character doesn't have much use for the opposite sex, either, but Bates gives her anti-male lines such a cheerful, breezy, all-American spin that she's irresistibly funny, and, against all odds, believable.

It's clear that Chechik and Roos have no idea why they're remaking "Diabolique," and that their attempt to adapt the story to contemporary American sensibilities is just a shot in the dark. They try everything: extra violence, dog jokes, a nude scene for Adjani, Stone's goofy wardrobe, feminism—whatever works. But all that this desperate-to-please picture proves is that if the sweater's too tight it's stupid to add padding. The remake struts around in its vintage clothing as if it were dressed to kill, but the filmmakers are their own victims. Someone should have told them that they couldn't pull it off.


Sharon Stone, Isabelle Adjani, and Chazz Palminteri in "Diabolique."

NICOLAS DE CRECY

RICHARD PEARCE'S "A Family Thing" is a leisurely, unassuming drama about ordinary folks—in other words, the sort of movie that defines itself as the antithesis of big-budget button-pushers like "Diabolique." The stars, Robert Duvall and James Earl Jones, wear their roles like broken-in work clothes. The screenplay, by Billy Bob Thornton and Tom Epperson, has a drawling Southern rhythm that enables the movie to explore the hot topic of race relations with cool reason. In the opening scenes, an Arkansas tractor salesman, Earl Pilcher (Duvall), learns that the woman who reared him was not his real mother. A posthumous letter from Mama Pilcher informs him that he's the offspring of a black woman who was raped by his father, and that he has a black half brother named Ray Murdock, who lives in Chicago. Earl, without telling his wife and their daughter exactly what he's doing, heads north to look up his kin. Ray (Jones) proves to be a widowed cop who lives with his blind Aunt T. (Irma P. Hall) and his grown son, Virgil (Michael Beach). Naturally, the brothers don't hit it off right away: Earl isn't a mean-spirited man, but his reflexive, unthinking racism makes him sort of testy about the situation he's in; Ray sees Earl as the living evidence of a crime.

The men are, of course, destined to accept each other as brothers, and the movie, taking everything slow and easy, manages to make the process of reconciliation credible. "A Family Thing" also demonstrates wittily the inanity of racial classification: in one scene, Earl, drunk and feeling a little sorry for himself, blurts out, "I'm black as a coal miner's drawers," and, as you look at the extremely white face of Robert Duvall, you have to laugh. At some point, you realize that your enjoyment of the picture isn't so much pleasure at what's on the screen as gratitude for what's not. And because the filmmakers, in their effort to avoid being vulgar, manipulative, and inflammatory, sacrifice a good deal of dramatic energy, the movie's gentle style becomes faintly irritating; perversely, you begin to wish for something less even-tempered. In the final scene, Earl and Ray drink to their mother at her grave and then head off for a meeting with Earl's white family, Earl quietly warning his newfound brother, "This is not gonna be like a Sunday picnic, you know." Then the credits roll: the movie tactfully declines to show us what might have been the liveliest and most revealing scene in the story. This discreetness is the curse of the small, worthy movie, as surely as in-your-face shamelessness is the curse of the conventional Hollywood product. Both types of film define themselves too narrowly: like Earl at the beginning of "A Family Thing," they're a little too comfortable with who they think they are. ♦

SHOUTS & MURMURS

MOVIE MOVIE

BY THOMAS MEEHAN

FADE IN: *Coney Island, summertime, after midnight. The edge of the city, where the sidewalk ends. Shadows and fog. Rain. Waterworld. A man and a woman,* BONNIE *and* CLYDE, *frantic, run for cover.*

BONNIE (*breathless, waiting to exhale*): Who'll stop the rain?

CLYDE: Baby, the rain must fall.

BONNIE: Where do we go from here, sweetie?

CLYDE: Don't go near the water. Nowhere to run, no place to hide. The awful truth, doll face—I am a fugitive from a chain gang, the man who shot Liberty Valance.

BONNIE: The man I love, wanted for murder?

CLYDE: I confess. In the meantime, darling, while the city sleeps, kiss the blood off my hands.

BONNIE (*speechless*): You must be joking. Give a girl a break.

CLYDE (*ruthless*): Lady beware—murder is my business. Murder, my sweet, murder by death—the big chill, the big sleep. My gun is quick.

BONNIE: It had to be you. So this is love.

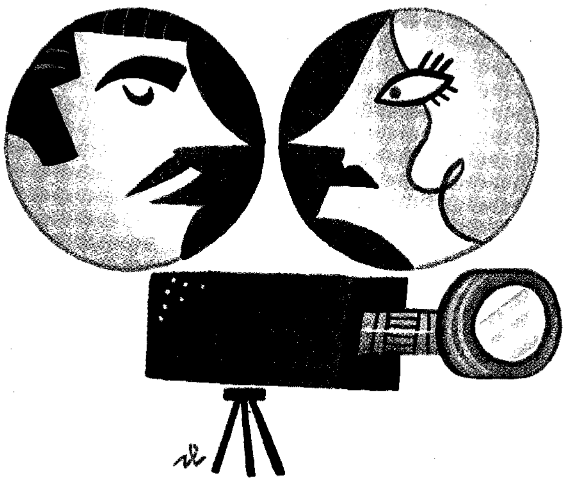
CLYDE: I never promised you a rose garden, babe. Reality bites.

BONNIE: Oh, God, what a life. Pulp fiction. Born in East L.A. Born to be bad. Fast times at Ridgemont High. Zero for conduct. Wild in the streets. Reckless. Reform school girls. Women's prison. Unwed mother. So I married an axe murderer, a guy named Joe. Dust be my destiny. I wake up screaming. Life stinks.

CLYDE: You're telling me? This is my life, tootsie. Born on the Fourth of July, in old Chicago. The Scarface mob, my cousin Vinny, they made me a criminal. Blackmail, grand theft auto, murder. Framed. Ran. Caught. The Big House. Riot in Cell Block 11. Breakout. Pursued. I died a thousand times, pretty woman, till there was you. Those lips, those eyes, fatal attraction. Suddenly, single white female, I want you. Carnal knowledge, naked.

BONNIE: Sorry, wrong number, Mr. Wonderful—it's love I'm after. Endless love.

CLYDE: What's love got to do with it? Everybody does it. You're only young once, my little chickadee. Let's spend the night together, up close & personal.



BONNIE: My foolish heart. Persuasion. The girl can't help it. Move over, darling, the lady is willing. Hold me, thrill me, kiss me!

CLYDE: My dream is yours, immortal beloved—a night to remember.

BONNIE (*cries and whispers; ecstasy*): At long last love! True romance! All this, and heaven too. Hold back the dawn, hold back tomorrow. Whoopee!

UNDER THE BOARDWALK: *The morning after, sunrise. Blue skies. Heat. The girl who couldn't say no, in a lonely place, seduced and abandoned.*

BONNIE (*clueless*): About last night . . . do the right thing. Every girl should be married, if . . . (*Shattered*) So ends our night. Vanished. Gone with the wind. Dishonored, betrayed, violated, manhandled, deceived. It started with a kiss. Dumb and dumber. Never love a stranger.

(*Enter laughing, a man for all seasons.*)

CLYDE: Hello again. Has anybody seen my gal?

BONNIE (*bedazzled*): The guy who came back.

CLYDE: Arise, my love, you were meant for me.

BONNIE: From here to eternity, Mr. Lucky?

CLYDE: Always. Just tell me what you want, morning glory.

BONNIE: I'll take romance. A walk in the sun, on the beach, in the good old summertime. (*Walking tall*) Isn't it romantic? It all came true. And now tomorrow, the best years of our lives. Happy ever after?

CLYDE: Forever darling. Forever and a day. Till the end of time. I love you to death. (*Sudden fear*) Don't look now, here comes Mr. Jordan, rogue cop. Run!

MR. JORDAN (*gung ho, gun crazy*): I'm gonna git you, sucka! Die hard with a vengeance!

(*Gunfire. Shootout, in cold blood, in broad daylight.*)

BONNIE (*fallen angel; blood and sand*): Thanks a million. This is the life, dying young.

CLYDE (*dead man walking, falling down, dazed and confused*): Where does it hurt?

BONNIE: My left foot. All of me. It's a mad, mad, mad, mad world. Kiss me deadly, a kiss before dying.

CLYDE: Farewell, my lovely. Kiss tomorrow goodbye.

BONNIE (*whispers; last embrace*): I'll be seeing you. It's a wonderful life, but not for me. Sayonara.

(*Fade to black.*) ◆

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